The Novels of Honoré de Balzac

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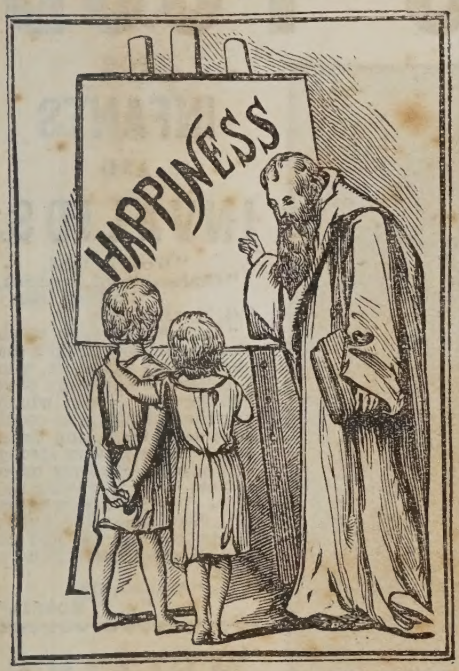

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"Unquestionably he ranks as one of the few great geniuses who appear by ones and twos in century after century of authorship, and who leave their mark ineffaceably on the literature of their age. And yet, among all the readers—a large class—who are from various causes unaccustomed to study French literature in its native language, there are probably very many who have never even heard of the name of Honoré de Balzac."—CHARLES DICKENS: *All the Year Round.*

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE MAGIC SKIN

(LA PEAU DE CHAGRIN)

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL
GLASGOW AND NEW YORK
1888

BALZAC'S NOVELS IN ENGLISH.

1. PÈRE GORIOT.
2. THE DUCHESSE DE LANGEAIS.
3. CÉSAR BIROTTEAU.
4. EUGÉNE GRANDET.
5. COUSIN PONS.
6. THE COUNTRY DOCTOR.
7. THE TWO BROTHERS.
8. THE ALKAHEST.
9. MODESTE MIGNON.
10. THE MAGIC SKIN.

(Others to follow.)

DALZIEL BROTHERS, CAMDEN PRESS, LONDON, N.W.

CONTENTS.

		Page
Introduction	. . . . .	vii
Part I.	The Talisman	1
Part II.	The Woman without a Heart . .	86
Part III.	The Death Agony	212

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INTRODUCTION.

The initial idea of Balzac's "Comédie Humaine" was derived from Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire's doctrine of the unity of composition. He proposed to analyze society as the great philosophical anatomist had analyzed the zoölogical kingdom, and to explain the differences between classes of men and women by demonstrating the influence of environment in modifying a common humanity. In order to carry out this colossal undertaking it was necessary to dissect society, to examine its various states and elements, both separately and together, to catalogue with laborious and patient thoroughness all the manifold tendencies, influences, external and internal agencies, which in myriad combinations operate to produce the phenomena called in the aggregate civilized life. He did not regard himself as a writer of romances, but as a social historian, or, as he himself put it, as the secretary of French society, which acted its own history while he took notes of all that passed before his eyes. But, as he says in the general introduction to his collected works, after having done all this, after having accumulated the material for a real history of society in the nineteenth century, "ought I not to study the reasons or the reason of these social

effects, and if possible surprise the hidden meaning in this immense assemblage of figures, passions, and events? Finally, after having sought, I do not say found, this reason, this social motor, is it not necessary to meditate the principles of Nature, and ascertain in what society departs from or approaches the eternal law of Truth and Beauty?"

The greater part of the "Comédie Humaine" is occupied with the dissection of modern, or, to be exact, French society. It has been said of Balzac that he preferred to paint the seamy side, — that he chose vice rather than virtue for illustration; but all such criticism simply marks the limitations of the critic. Balzac in truth painted with marvellous and absolutely fearless faithfulness that which he saw. If vice triumphs often in his works, if virtue is often defeated, crushed, martyred, it is because this is what happens in the world, because he could not represent society as it existed without bringing into strong relief all those consequences of unbridled egoism which manifest themselves as injustice, greed, lust, perfidy, fraud, dishonesty, hatred, meanness, inhumanity, and which were then, are now, and perhaps ever will be in active antagonism to all that belongs to the higher life. But Balzac was not a pessimist. He believed in human progress. In the general introduction already quoted he says: "Man is neither good nor bad. He is born with instincts and aptitudes. Society, far from depraving him, as Rousseau pretended, elevates and improves him. But self-interest develops evil tendencies in him;" and the natural remedy for them, he holds, is religion.

That was his personal belief, but it did not interfere

with the prosecution of his life-work, which was to show society its own image, as exactly and completely as possible, neither extenuating anything nor setting down aught in malice. Having, however, accomplished this great labor, he intended to crown his work by a series of philosophical and analytical studies, in which the inner significance of the great drama should be unfolded, and which should lead up to the establishment of certain principles tending to facilitate the evolution of a higher civilization. He did not live to accomplish this division of his enterprise, but the "Philosophical Studies," of which "The Magic Skin" (La Peau de Chagrin) forms the first, embody the main conceptions which were to have been developed in the uncompleted series. "The Magic Skin" was indeed the first of his works which secured to Balzac any serious reputation. In "The Chouans," which preceded it, he had shown a growing mastery of his literary tools. In the "Physiology of Marriage" he had seemed to appeal only to the French fondness for the fantastic and the audacious. But "The Magic Skin" was the opening of an entirely new vein; and while it cannot be said that its full meaning was apprehended by the average reader of his day, there could be no doubt as to the power and erudition displayed in it.

When it was written, the scheme of the "Comédie Humaine" was in embryo; but Balzac had already matured the philosophy which runs through all his works, and he was fresh from a course of philosophical, psychological and occult studies which he had been pursuing steadily for three years, while leading an ascetic life in a miserable garret, and practising his pen upon

those crude romances which he published under various pseudonyms, and which have only been gathered together since his death, and very unnecessarily republished under the collective title, "Œuvres de Jeunesse." No author of his eminence has been so ill-served in respect of biographical monuments. Not only has no attempt been made to write an adequate life of him, but of the many fragmentary records prepared by his colleagues and contemporaries, there is scarcely one which is not frivolous. Werdet, Gozlan, Baschet, Champfleury, Desnoiresterres, Gautier, Sainte-Beuve, Lamartine, have all written about him, but not one otherwise than superficially. Sainte-Beuve might have been expected, perhaps, to deal with the subject penetratingly, but either he could not trust his personal feelings or he felt Balzac to be beyond the gauge of his critical plummet, and certainly neither of his Balzac papers is worthy of him. Gautier has written appreciatively and brilliantly, but Gautier could no more comprehend such a mind as Balzac's than the god Pan could comprehend the metaphysic of the schools. It happens, moreover, that the psychical side of Balzac, which was really one of the strongest in his nature, has been in a special way obscured and neglected through the dense materialism of the majority of his contemporaries and critics.

Because he depicted a state of society in which material things, possessions, ambitions, were the be-all and the end-all of action and effort, it was assumed that he himself deliberately selected that kind of life for illustration. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There was a deep vein of mysticism in Balzac, as there must ever be in men whose genius enables them to take

large views of life, and whose intellectual enterprise leads them to examine nature carefully and to reject the trammels of authority in forming their judgments. The spirit which sneers at mysticism is no doubt much in evidence at present, but it is none the less a sign of intellectual shallowness and servitude to convention which affords little solid ground for self-gratulation. Balzac had earned the right to hold opinions on occult subjects by profound study. His critics, while knowing nothing of the studies, but proceeding on *a priori* grounds, have affected a superior air in commenting on his psychological views, and have seemed to imply that his researches in this direction indicated some mental weakness on his part.

The result has been a sort of "conspiracy of silence" in regard to one of the most interesting periods of his mental growth; and had he not, in the present work and in "Louis Lambert," given some autobiographic material, very little would be known of his psychical investigations. Gautier, whose own temperament may almost be said to have rendered the suprasensual unintelligible to him, had nevertheless the keenness of perception to realize that Balzac was not as other men, but that he possessed special faculties. Thus he observes: "Though it may seem a strange assertion in the nineteenth century, Balzac was a Seer;" and he goes on to illustrate this by referring to the wonderful power which Balzac exercised, not only of creating but of sustaining in full vigor and sharply differentiated attitudes and characters, "the two or three thousand types that play more or less important parts in the 'Comédie Humaine.'" Gautier says: "He did not copy them, he

lived them ideally, wore their clothes, contracted their habits, surrounded himself with their conditions — *was* each one of them whenever necessary." Every commentator on Balzac, from Sainte-Beuve to Taine, has dwelt upon this characteristic of his work, — the unparalleled vitality and realness of his creations. No other writer approaches him in this; and it is a gift usually sought to be explained by using the much-abused word "intuition."

It is necessary to examine this point with care, for it has a direct relation with that philosophical system which Balzac made his own, and through it a clew to many other problems may be obtained. The faculty spoken of as intuition was, in the author of the "Comédie Humaine," as in all creative geniuses, that of embodying his thoughts so perfectly that for himself, during the heat of composition, those embodied thoughts became to all practical intents objective appearances. It has been said repeatedly that Balzac often seemed to regard his characters as living persons; nay, there is at least one striking remark of his on record which indicates that they were to him even more real than the material things about him. But the creation of these *eidola*, however wonderful, is as nothing to the psychical feat of maintaining them in existence. The general idea probably is that an author carefully thinks out everything his characters are to say and do before he puts pen to paper. The fact is far otherwise. Both Thackeray and Dickens asserted that they were often absolutely surprised by the sayings and doings of their creations; and this was no doubt also the case with Balzac. There is indeed a concurrence

of evidence proceeding from writers in whom the so-called intuitional faculty has been most fully developed, to the effect that when the imagination has once informed a fictitious character with the semblance of life, that character may go on to control its own movements, and exercise apparently an individual volition, evolving ideas and tendencies, of the suggestion of which the author is wholly unconscious.

The connection between this singular experience and the philosophy of Balzac is closer than may at first appear. He controlled two avenues to knowledge, — his literary acquirements and his observation of the world. To the mastery of each he had devoted time and patient study; and such was the fusing force of his genius that he was able to employ either method indifferently. His personal experience was of a character to convince him of the potency of Will and of Thought. For not only could he create immaterial characters, and clothe them with a vitality so strong that, as one of his critics observes, they seem ready to leap out of the pages of his books, but in encountering men and women in the material world he seemed to himself able to penetrate beneath the mask of flesh, to survey their minds, to apprehend their joys and sorrows, and, as he himself said, "their desires, their needs, all passed into my soul, and my soul passed into theirs." This strange endowment must have generated exceptional ideas in him concerning the power of Thought; and even from early youth the problem of Will had fascinated and absorbed him. All that is said in this book on the "Treatise of the Will" is autobiographical. The discussion of the question indeed belongs properly to the

history of "Louis Lambert;" but it may be said here that Balzac himself exhibited throughout his life an abnormally energetic and persistent Volition. The confession of Raphael in "The Magic Skin" is in fact the confession of Balzac so far as it relates to his early trials, his intellectual struggles, his stern self-repression, and his pursuit of the deepest problems. His carnal propensities were undoubtedly those of a *bon vivant* and man of the world; but no monk of the Thebaid ever crucified the flesh more rigorously than this robust and society-loving Tourangean.

In the years during which he haunted the streets of Paris and took observations of real life, and watched the motives of men and analyzed human conduct, he saw enough to strengthen and confirm his belief as to the gravity of the parts played in the human comedy by Will and Thought. Yet it is not to be inferred that he was the discoverer of a new philosophy or psychology. He had read deeply in the lore of the East as well as in that of the West. He had held no human thought to be above or below his pains. He was as well acquainted with the metaphysics of Hindustan as with those of Europe. His memory was prodigious, and he was always able to collate his own experiences with the *dicta* of others in all ages. Something of that which he saw at this time, something of that Paris world of which he became the analyst and historian, M. Taine has described with graphic force. "In that black ant-hill," he writes, "life is too active. Democracy established and government centralized have drawn together all the men of ambition, and inflamed all their aspirations. Gold, glory, pleasure, prepared

and heaped up, are quarries pursued by a maddened pack of insatiable desires, aggravated by the struggle and the rivalry. To succeed! — this word, unknown a century since, is to-day the sovereign ruler of all lives. Paris is an arena; involuntarily one is drawn into it; everything vanishes but the idea of the goal and the rivals; the runner feels their breath upon his shoulder; all his energies are on the strain; in this spasm of volition he doubles his enthusiasm, and contracts the fever which at once exhausts and sustains him. Thence arise prodigies of work, and not only the work of the man of science who studies until he sinks, or of the artist who creates until he collapses, but the work of the man who plots, intrigues, weighs his words, measures his friendships, interweaves the myriad threads of his hopes to catch a clientage, a place, or a name. Far indeed are we from the ways of our fathers, and from those *salons* where a well-written letter, a prettily-turned madrigal, a witty saying, gave interest to a whole evening, and sometimes founded a reputation! But this is nothing; the fever of the brain is worse than that of the will. The accession of the *bourgeoisie* has given the freedom of the city to all the professions; with specialists, special ideas have entered the world; the current of thought is no longer a gentle stream of fashionable slander and gossip, of gallantry or light philosophy, but a great river which is swollen by the turbulent affluents of finance, speculation, chicanery, diplomacy, and erudition; it is a torrent which, pouring every morning into each brain, both nourishes and drowns the receiver."

All the strongest minds of the whole world, he con-

tinues, contribute to this overwhelming flood. Whoever thinks is represented. Every conceivable idea has its special advocate and illustrator. "From all these smoking brains, thought rises like a vapor; it is breathed involuntarily; it sparkles in a thousand restless eyes." And what, he asks, is the relief from this fever of the will and of thought? "Another fever, — that of the senses. In the country the tired man goes to bed at nine, or sits in the chimney-corner with his wife and pokes the fire, or takes a stroll in the great empty high-road, peacefully, with slow steps, contemplating the monotonous plain, and thinking of the weather of the morrow. Observe Paris at the same hour: the gas is lighted, the boulevard fills, the theatres are crowded, the masses amuse themselves; they go wherever mouth, ears, or eyes discern a possible gratification, a pleasure of a refined, artificial kind, — a kind of unwholesome cookery, designed to stimulate, not to nourish, — offered by greed and excess to satiety and corruption." This is the Paris Balzac studied, and which, M. Taine holds, had entered into him more deeply than into other men. "Who," he says, "has fought, thought, and enjoyed more than he? Whose soul and body have burned more fiercely with all these fevers?"

But M. Taine is not quite right here. It was Balzac who grasped Paris more completely than ordinary men, not Paris that obtained a greater mastery than common over him. His genius lifted the veil, clarified the turbid atmosphere, disentangled the confused threads of existence, and evolved from the mingled strife of will, thought, and sense, that marvellous gallery of pictures which constitutes the "Comédie

Humaine." It is, however, curious, and perhaps somewhat significant, that M. Taine, in describing this Paris world employs Balzac's own methods, figures, and points of view. When he speaks of the smoking brains whence the seething thoughts issue like vapor, he is following in the lines laid down by Balzac in his general introduction, and developed further in this work. For thought, according to the great writer, is as distinctly one of the forces of nature as electricity and magnetism, and together with will-power it dominates the universe. The doctrine is no doubt ancient. It can be found in the Kabbala, and it may be traced far beyond the genesis of the Kabbala, in the venerable philosophies of Asia. Offshoots from this doctrine moreover are to be seen even to-day in the popular superstitions of many countries, Western as well as Eastern, and — so do extremes meet — in the best-attested records of modern medical science. Balzac held that Will and Thought can and do influence and control material things. The sobriety of such a contention can only be questioned by those who are unacquainted with physiology, psychology, and pathology. It is, however, rather singular that whereas the influence of the mind upon the body it occupies has long been fully recognized, the possibility that the mind of one person may influence either the mind or the body of another has only been admitted after a protracted resistance, and when denial had become futile.

The recent researches of Charcot, Richet, and others into the phenomena called hypnotic, and the remarkable discoveries made concerning the influence of suggestion upon sensitive subjects, have familiarized the

public with facts which are clearly related in many ways to the theories of Balzac. If the simple exercise of volition on the part of a magnetizer, unexpressed in words or by gestures, can produce in the subject all the effects of a self-evolved purpose, and can even close the mind of that subject to all moral warnings and inhibitions, so that the suggestion of murder will be acted upon with precisely the same unhesitating readiness as a prompting to eat or drink; and if this external control can be so employed that the suggestion will be carried out, not on the instant of release from the hypnotic state, but after a lapse of time, — the difficulty of escaping the conclusion that will-power is a distinct natural force is clearly increased enormously. The recent experiments at the Salpêtrière would, however, not have astonished Balzac more than they surprise those who have studied the occult sciences. The power now being brought within the purview of science was not only known to, but exploited by inquiring minds ages ago. Like so many of the alleged discoveries upon which Western civilization prides itself, this is in truth not a discovery at all, but a tardy recognition of truth long since ascertained in other countries, and until now obstinately and stupidly ignored by those who at present plume themselves upon their knowledge of it. For centuries obscure phenomena have been dealt with in the West upon much the same principle. When facts could neither be denied nor explained they were labelled with a name which sounded as if it signified something. The term "hysteria" has thus been employed, or rather abused, in medicine, and to-day it covers a multitude of phenomena which a

stubborn materialism is utterly incapable of accounting for. Take for example those singular collective attacks of frenzy which have periodically been observed in many countries, and of which a case has occurred during the present year. In these remarkable seizures whole communities are affected. The books are full of them. They have been recorded for centuries. When Europe abounded with monastic and conventual establishments they were frequently experienced in nunneries. The Church found an easy explanation of the phenomena in attributing them to demoniac possession. The Reformation did not put a stop to them. When there were no longer secluded communities the attacks occurred in rural districts, sometimes involving all the inhabitants of a village, sometimes being confined to the young men and maids, and again taking possession of the children only. During the early part of this century notable disturbances of this kind took place in Wales and parts of Ireland. At almost the same time what was then "the West" in the United States was the scene of frequent similar outbreaks. Often they were intimately associated with religious excitement. It was during a period of such general disturbance, when the air seemed full of malefic cerebral stimulants, that Mormonism took its rise.

In all these cases, as in the well-known though ill-understood excitements connected with negro camp-meetings, the most prominent phenomenon is the power of contagion present. A story is told of a hard-headed sceptic, who, while riding in the West with a friend one day, came to a stream in which a Mormon missionary was baptizing converts, while he harangued a

crowd. The travellers alighted and sat down to listen. Suddenly the sceptic turned pale, as though about to faint, and cried to his companion, "Take me away!" He was helped to his horse, and after riding a mile or two partially recovered himself, and turning to his friend said: "If you had not taken me away when you did I should have plunged into the water with those converts. I had lost all control over myself." This is but a typical illustration of the imperative urgency with which the mysterious influence operates on such occasions. We may call this influence hysteria, but we shall be as far as ever from understanding the subject, and have only put off the mystery, after the fashion of the housemaid who swept the dust about until she lost it. Perhaps the theory of hypnotic suggestion may now afford a clew to the problem. Dr. Carpenter was wont to make great play with his hypothesis of "expectant attention." He held that when the mind was strongly wrought up, and anticipating some novel experience, or the impact of some potent influence, it was possible to produce in it the most surprising hallucinations. It might at such times be fooled to the top of its bent, be cheated by simulated reports of the quiescent sensory nerves, be made to accept air-drawn phantoms for objective realities, be induced to confound a simple stick of wood with a strongly-charged electrical conductor. Yet Dr. Carpenter was obliged finally to admit that expectant attention did not account for many phenomena; and had he survived to this day it is quite possible that he would have welcomed the theory of hypnotic suggestion as tending to round out and complete his doctrine.

What the Psychical Research Society call "telepathy" is but another phase of the same question, and though the exceeding caution which has characterized the inquiry thus far is calculated to exhaust the patience of such as look for sensational developments only, it is really a line of investigation which promises better results than the experiments and conjectures of the author of "Mental Physiology" and his school. Telepathy involves recognition of at least some means of communication between mind and mind apart from the ordinary avenues, and if carried far enough this inquest may terminate in the re-discovery of physical and psychical truths which were known to the ancients. Intuition, however, is not the common heritage, and in such measure as Balzac possessed it is known to but few. M. Taine does not exactly laugh, but certainly wonders at him, because of his theory that "ideas are organized beings which exist in the invisible world and influence our destinies." Again this is a venerable doctrine, but it is of a kind which to Balzac must have seemed almost a truism, — for the strength of his creative powers was such that the ideas which came to him passed at once into actual being *for him;* and the occult and Kabbalistic belief that not only deeds but words and thoughts remain forever preserved in the "astral light" must have appeared quite in accord with his personal experience so far as the latter went. With his views of the importance of Will and Thought in the scheme of things, the suggestions of physical science even in this line of thought were of a character to stimulate imagination and encourage daring inquiry. For if no act or utterance of any living being leaves the

universe exactly as it was; if in the elastic medium which surrounds us the flutter of a gnat's wing, no less than the explosion of a volcano, is registered in vibrations which must continue to infinity; if the curse of the ruffian, the groan of his dying victim, the sob of the bereaved mother, the shout of the charging soldier, each in its way, and each differently, affects the great mundane system, however impalpably and imperceptibly to us, — how much more credibly must the fundamental cause of all physical action, the energizing Will of man, impress itself in its operation upon the sphere corresponding in nature to its own refined and tenuous substance. To the Seer there was no inherent difficulty in such conceptions. Will and Thought were in his view not only real things, but, without figure and without mental reservation, the most real entities in existence, and the most influential.

The truth that thought rules the world has indeed been always perceived by the observing, and recognized directly or indirectly by mankind. Even the physical effects of psychological conditions have been so generally noted that among the commonplaces of speech in most countries are words or phrases attempting some definition of these phenomena. When, for instance, the "personal magnetism" of some prominent man is spoken of, what is really meant is the remarkable development of his volitional energy, which, when exerted to attract and conciliate those who approach him, affects them in a peculiar, subtle way, evoking their sympathies, and drawing their affections towards him, without conscious exercise of their own will and judgment. This is domination of weaker wills by a

strong one, and it is a kind of manifestation shown by common experience to be often associated with the pursuit of large ambitions. The popular explanation of such influence is really an admission of its occult character. The term "personal magnetism" is intended to cover something other than, and beyond the ordinary impression made by a pleasant voice, eye, face, or manner. It is in fact the popular way of expressing that limited and imperfect apprehension of the true nature of Thought and Will which represents the least advanced conceptions on the subject. Balzac's theory of Thought and Will as natural forces, like electricity, capable of being concentrated and directed with special effect upon particular objects, on the other hand, may be regarded as the expression of an abnormally extended view, — as the deduction of a thinker and experimentalist whose capacity for analysis and whose insight so far exceeded those of the generality of men as to give peculiar weight and importance to his conclusions. For this line of research he possessed rare and precious aptitudes. Excelling in that creative mental force which is called imagination perhaps every modern save Shakspeare, no man could have been better fitted to examine mental processes, to gauge their effects, to estimate their significance, and to define their nature and scope. No man has ever been more thoroughly equipped for this task by knowledge of philosophy, science, and human nature. Taine said of him that "the immensity of his undertaking was almost equalled by the immensity of his erudition." In the fields where it is possible to follow him, many have tried to catch him tripping, but few have been

repaid by any discovery of error on his part. What he knew — and it was much — he knew with a surprising thoroughness. He was no smatterer, though he took all knowledge for his domain. No such blunders as Goethe made in the law of optics can be charged against Balzac. It is only in regard to his theories concerning that region of physiological psychology which remains no-man's land still that any of his critics have ventured to question his accuracy; and in all that pertains to that region dogmatism is prohibited by the uniform failure of at least the average human intelligence to solve the central problems involved.

While recognizing the power of Thought, however, Balzac perceived in it a destructive, as well as a constructive efficiency; and this view it is which he has especially illustrated in "The Magic Skin." Here also he only went before his contemporaries and predecessors in degree, not in kind. The idea that the mind might exhaust, wear out the body, had long been entertained. Thus Fuller, speaking of the Duke of Alva, says: "He was one of a lean body and visage, as if his eager soul, biting for anger at the clog of his body, desired to fret a passage through it." So also Dryden, in a familiar passage, describes —

> "A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
> Fretted the pygmy body to decay,
> And o'er-informed the tenement of clay."

Shakspeare has many similar allusions. But Balzac's philosophy included analysis of the consequences, not only of use, but abuse of the thinking power, and he

wrote "The Magic Skin" as a commentary upon one of the salient evils of modern civilization: the increasing tendency to excess generated by the headlong pace at which existence is carried on, and stimulated by the intenseness of competition, and the enhanced attractiveness of the objects of human desire. M. Taine, already cited, has given his picture of the kind of life drawn by the author of the "Comédie Humaine." It was in that turbulent scene that he watched the expansion of what he held to be suicidal habits among the most energetic and capable members of society. Paris apart, there is no place second to New York, probably, in the eager adoption of the same business cult. As Taine says of his own capital, everything has been subordinated to "success" in the American metropolis. There, as in Paris, all the energies of thousands are directed to the one end, and vitality is expended upon its attainment with a lavishness which not seldom entails the penalty of incapacity for enjoyment when the long sought quarry is at length run down.

"The Magic Skin" ought, indeed, to be a familiar and easily apprehended symbol in this country, for too many of our young men have made Raphael's rash choice, and undergone Raphael's punishment. This part of the allegory, at least, is very transparent. The Eastern talisman is the undisciplined lust of worldly success, indulgence in which shortens life literally and directly by exhausting the nervous energy. The old bric-a-brac dealer expounds the doctrine in his speech warning the desperate youth against the awful contract proposed in the Arabic inscription on the skin.

The influence of strong ideas socially is a favorite theme with Balzac. In fact it constitutes so intimate an element in his social theory that he treats it in a great variety of ways. M. Félix Davin wrote, in 1834, a general introduction to the fourth edition of the "Philosophical Studies," and as this paper was prepared avowedly under the inspiration of Balzac, its statements and explanations are trustworthy. M. Davin devotes considerable space to this question of the general treatment of what may be called "dominant ideas" in the "Studies of Manners." The author, he observes, is constantly exhibiting the irritation and aggravation of instincts by ideas, the consequent generation of passion, and the disorganizing effects produced by the operation of social influences upon this resultant. And he names several stories, such as "Adieu," "El Verdugo," "Le Requisitionnaire," "Un Drame au bord de la mer," "César Birotteau," etc., in all of which, life is destroyed by excessive thought, ideation, or imagination. The maternal love, family pride, greed of inheritance, anger, fear of shame, each in turn appears as the lethal instrument, and kills the victims as surely as knife, cord, or poison could do. The tendency to excess is so strongly marked a characteristic of the present time that no careful and intelligent study of it can be other than interesting. It happens, too, that the Paris of Balzac's time was so far in advance of the rest of the world in relation to whirl and fever and fury of life that the rest of the world has consumed a generation in getting to where the French capital was then. One consequence of this is that Balzac's descriptions of his own period appear,

especially so far as concerns his Paris observations, to be contemporary records, and to bear the very form and pressure of the time. With the general increase of wealth and luxury, the temptations to excess in the use of acquisitive means have multiplied enormously, while degrees of prosperity which half a century ago were thought scarcely attainable are now so far down in the scale of possibilities that the truly ambitious no longer regard them as deserving serious consideration.

The episode of the banquet at Taillefer's (who figures in "L'Auberge rouge" in a very sinister rôle) was originally published separately; and the guests, oddly enough, were given the names of living writers and poets. Victor Hugo and Thiers, among others, were thus exhibited, and Balzac does not appear to have thought that they had any cause of complaint. Considering the state of the Paris press at the time, perhaps they had not; for the period was one of gross personalities, and French journalism was incredibly licentious and not less incredibly corrupt. When the banquet scene was put in its proper place in the completed story the real names were exchanged for the fictitious ones which appear at present. This episode is but the machinery for introducing Raphael's story of the countess Fedora, the woman without a heart, and this is another figure. Fedora is symbolical of Society, which lives for itself and its own pleasures and luxuries; which is polished, cold, indifferent, yet desirous of obtaining gratuitously the best of all the lives attracted by its glitter and ostentation; which allures by its air of distinction, its parade of wealth, its affectation of exclusiveness, its versatility and surface show of intel-

lect and wit; and which is, like the beautiful and fascinating Russian, absolutely void of heart, and scarcely capable of feigning sensibility enough to make a decorous appearance.

Raphael brings to this siren all the treasures of youth. The discipline of his adolescence, the stern rigor of his garret life, the nature of his studies and his intellectual tendencies and preferences, may all be regarded as pages from Balzac's autobiography. The "Treatise of the Will" referred to is his own college experiment, so cruelly crushed by the fatal imbecility of a booby teacher. Emerging from his garret, however, Raphael enters a realm which is pure fiction. There is never any hope for him, and perhaps he perceives this, though he cannot relinquish his pursuit of the heartless Fedora. But Raphael himself is not a character calculated to attract much sympathy. Designed to illustrate Balzac's theory of the baleful social effect of excess, he exhibits from the first an absorbed egoism, which puts him morally almost on a level with the Society he learns to hate and despise. There is little nobility in the youth. He possesses marked intellectual ability, but little heart. The suffering he endures from Fedora appears to be mainly inflicted upon his vanity. His love for the countess is something between a caprice and a calculation. It has in it scarcely any spontaneity, and when at last the futility of his devotion is realized, and he determines upon suicide, his motive is clearly not merely despairing love, but discouraged ambition. Of course Balzac meant all this to be so. The possessor of the magic skin must be a self-indulgent, egoistic person. He could not possibly be a

man of the Benassis type in the "Country Doctor." Raphael desires enjoyment, even gross, sensual enjoyment; and to obtain it he is willing to risk his life, as he has already risked and lost, first his opportunities, and then his property. No doubt the influence of Fedora counts for much in his depravation. She has hardened and roughened him, killed in him all confidence in womanhood, fostered in him the cynicism whose germs were inherited, and confirmed in him all the selfish propensities with which he began life. But the young man is none the less the natural possessor of the talisman, so far as his abstract ideas are concerned. It seems to him that he will hesitate at nothing in following out his self-indulgent fancies. In effect, the moment he fully realizes the nature of the contract into which he has entered, all possibility of enjoying his newly-acquired power vanishes for him; and this is the logical and inevitable consequence of the same egoism that led him to accept the magic skin.

Here the parable is plain. The abuse of Will and Thought brings its natural penalty. The man who devotes himself to the attainment of material ends is liable to find, when the goal is reached, that he is no longer capable of enjoying the prize. Raphael, with the magic skin hanging on his wall, and the effects of the expenditure of will-power under his eyes, is paralyzed. Desire means death to him, and to avoid it he must vegetate, live by line and plummet, ward off all exciting causes, and above all shun everything that may induce him to wish anything. It would not be possible to conceive a more tremendous satire than this, and yet it is not an exaggeration of the actual, but merely

a new way of presenting it. What Raphael suffers from the contraction of the magic skin is precisely what living men suffer who have abused their will-power in pursuing success in material things. They are in the position of Tantalus. With the means in their hands to obtain everything, they are disabled from attempting to procure anything. They can only watch the shrinking talisman which holds their life, and limit their desires to the attainment of a state of existence as closely resembling annihilation as possible. This is what the talisman has brought Raphael at the beginning of the third part, and this is the most deeply philosophical division of the book, as well as the most strikingly impressive and dramatic.

Raphael, the disillusionized student, who at the opening of the tale has resolved to end his misery by suicide, appears, at the beginning of the third part, strangely metamorphosed. The reckless youth who wished, when the talisman was first offered to him, to die at the culmination of a wild debauch, has been brought to desire life with an intense longing, merely as life. The possession of the means by which his every wish can be gratified has suddenly checked his fierce acquisitiveness, — not, however, because he has gained any loftier view of the value and purpose of existence, but because in his final struggle we are to be shown egoism engaged in death-grapple with itself. Raphael is a type of modern civilization, of the eager self-seeker, the selfish fortune-hunter and money-grubber, who estimates everything in accordance with its real or fancied usefulness to himself. But precisely because he places his personality above everything else

he is unable to carry out the plan of self-indulgence he had conceived in his poverty and distress. The sight of the talisman which unmans him is the realization of the physical effects of his career of fierce desire. The excess of his passions, the intensity of his greed, has sapped his vitality, and at the moment when the wealth for which he has striven so desperately is in his hands, the tide of life begins to ebb.

He isolates himself, seeks to protect himself against every incitement to further desire, deliberately adopts a vegetative existence, and finds his sole remaining satisfaction in the oft-tested assurance that by this means he has arrested the shrinkage of the talisman. But in a struggle so complicated, by a nature so depraved, the holding of a steady course for any length of time is impracticable. The dominant egoism of his temperament will not be always cool and calculating and restrained. Waves of imperious desire will at intervals rise and sweep away the most prudent resolutions when the only object of action is self-gratification. In one of these periods of excitation he yields to what must be regarded as the nearest approach to real love of which he is capable. But the limits of the purity of this passion are rigidly drawn, and Balzac has marked them plainly. When first Raphael finds Pauline at the opera, he is drawn to her by a sentiment of real affection. This continues to influence him when they meet in his old room in the Hôtel Saint-Quentin. During this period the talisman does not shrink, for emotion of the higher kind does not exhaust vitality, but rather recruits it. When, however, the lovers have come together and are married, Raphael's passion at once be-

comes materialized, and he is made to learn very soon that he can only gratify it at the expense of his life.

With this discovery the frailty of his love for Pauline is disclosed. The old terror reclaims the mastery over him. Once more he banishes every one from his chamber, and returns to the dull routine of vegetation. Here Balzac takes the opportunity to satirize modern science, in the scenes in which Raphael is seeking the means of destroying the fatal talisman. The futile attempts of the zoölogist, the mechanician, and the chemist to explain, to analyze, and to make away with the magic skin, though reflecting most damagingly upon the orthodox classification and limitation of natural laws, do not at all disturb these *savants*, who are quite unanimous in the conclusion that if the facts are against them, so much the worse for the facts. In a subsequent chapter medicine is handled in the same spirit of mordant satire, — the esoteric object of the author being to illustrate the manner in which egoism affects even Science, by subordinating the reverence for Truth to the personal pride and vanity of its professors, and thus impelling them to mask systematic charlatanism and hypocrisy under social conventions. The eminent physicians called in consultation over Raphael's mysterious malady care nothing for the patient, and little for the higher aims of their own profession. Doubtless each would be glad to chronicle a cure if it redounded to the credit of his special theory; but neither is generous enough to be gratified by a success which traverses his own views. In order to hoodwink the public and maintain the semblance of harmony in the profession, they affect for one another's opinions a respect which they

are far from feeling; and they are one and all deaf and blind to the possibilities of phenomena in any way transcending the narrow limits of their materialistic training. It is to be observed, also, that nothing could be more modern than this remarkable consultation. It might have been held last year, or yesterday. It embodies the spirit of the whole century, and symbolizes traits of the present civilization, which appear to deepen with the increasing complexity of social life.

The attempt of Raphael to get rid of the talisman by force or craft, to annihilate it by violence, or to dissolve it by chemical reagents, could never have been really hopeful to him, though he tried to busy himself with the fantasy. He knew, as must every victim to the prevailing cult of egoism, the conditions upon which he held his remnant of vitality. He knew — for had not the old bric-a-brac dealer told him? — that whoso signed the mystic compact, by accepting possession of the talisman, was thereby committed to the end, and could no more draw back than could a man who, having thrown himself from the summit of the Vendome column, should repent and try to return to safety. But the desire for survival was so strong that he could not reconcile himself to the facts; and he was, as it were, compelled to try every avenue which seemed by any play of fancy to suggest the possibility of escape. When every essay has failed, he takes the advice of his medical men, and, coolly deserting Pauline without even a farewell word, journeys to a fashionable spa. His life there is a development of his secluded existence in his own hotel. The luxury of his establishment excites the admiration and envy of the

other guests, and his absorption in himself arouses their dislike and finally their hatred.

This is a very deep study of society. If, on the one hand, selfishness is the mainspring of the social organization, experience has proved that, on the other hand, mutual sacrifices are necessary to the due gratification and permanent maintenance of the pride of personality. Society flatters that it may be flattered; cajoles that it may be cajoled; caresses that it may be caressed; pretends to think well of its members that they may pretend to think well of it. He who, while under the social obligations which are inseparable from the possession of wealth, repudiates his social duties, despises and neglects all the conventional hypocrisies by which it is sought to cloak the pervading egoism, and insists on parading his own selfishness, naturally and brutally, mortally wounds this artificial organism, and inevitably makes of it an active and implacable enemy. He is a traitor to the unwritten constitution of modern civilization. He is an anarchist, whose baleful example threatens the whole fabric of deceit, and pretence, and sham chivalry, and make-believe refinement, and disguised greed and lust and self-seeking. He is the more disgusting and hateful in that he shows society itself as it feels and knows it really is; and since there remains a somewhat of good in things evil, since in the most corrupt periods vice pays to virtue the homage of hypocrisy, such a disclosure cannot but be humiliating and exasperating.

Therefore the society of the spa is leagued against him; and when an attempt to compass his removal by persuasion has failed, a quarrel is fastened upon him,

and he is entangled in a duel. Here again his dominant egoism controls him against his plainest interests. He cannot protect himself in the duel save by exerting his will-power, and thus causing the magic skin to shrink; but his pride has been stung, and he is resolved to give his enemies a sharp lesson, even though he suffers for it himself. The same ignoble impulse proves too strong for his prudence when, after killing his antagonist, he comes, while travelling, to a village where the people are enjoying a holiday. Soured by the spectacle of all this life and jollity, he yields to the suggestion of his misanthropy, and squanders another portion of his fast-fading vitality in calling down a sudden storm on the heads of the merry-makers. After the duel he makes one more desperate effort to recover his fleeting forces. Society has expelled him, and contact with it only irritates and exhausts him. He will now essay, in a modified form, the prescription which Mephistopheles offered to Faust in the Witch's Kitchen, as the alternative with the hag's elixir. There is, says Mephistopheles, another way of attaining old age: —

> " Begieb dich gleich hinaus aufs Feld,
> Fang' an zu hacken und zu graben,
> Erhalte dich und deinen Sinn
> In einem ganz beschränkten Kreise,
> Ernähre dich mit ungemischter Speise,
> Leb' mit dem Vieh als Vieh, — "

and thus a term of eighty years may be secured. Raphael throws himself upon the bosom of Nature, and endeavors to lead a purely natural life, among the simplest peasants, and in the most invigorating mountain

air. For a short time he imagines that the experiment will succeed; but it is not of bodily ailments he is dying, and the consuming power of undisciplined desire — the effects of mental excess — have proceeded too far in the work of disorganization for any remedy attainable by him. The constant sight of healthy animal life about him tears his selfish soul with anguish, and generates longings which, despite every effort at self-restraint, are registered in the inexorable contractions of the talisman.

At last he realizes the futility of his career and sullenly, despairingly, returns to Paris to face death. The last brief scene in this powerful allegory is at once the most daring and significant in the book. It expresses the utter degradation of the victim of modern civilization. It is the type of which the Baron Hulot, in "La Cousine Bette" is the individualization. A career of self-indulgence and self-seeking has extinguished the last spark of intellectuality in Raphael. There remain in his moribund organism only the animal desires. The habit and instinct of self-preservation have caused him to drive the loving, faithful Pauline from his side. When, at the very close, she makes her way to him, and he perceives that the end is at hand, his last feeble volitional impulse is toward the gratification of the lowest form of passion, at no matter what expense; and even in the act of dying this brutal impulse is crossed by another not less base, which finds expression in a futile attempt to tear his mistress with his teeth. He desires her as a Satyr might; yet at the same supreme moment his expiring egoism resents in her the exciting cause of the catastrophe. This is the enforcement of the

author's axiom that excess in Will and Thought operates as a dissolvent; that it tends to destroy both the society and the individual that indulge it; that it is suicidal, and kills not only the physical, but the psychical elements in man. But this is not the whole of the moral. Excess in all things, Balzac holds, is the distinctive characteristic of modern civilization, but excess in the pursuit of purely selfish aims is of all kinds the most deadly and disorganizing. And the course of modern society is a vicious circle; it enforces and it suffers from the prevailing cult of Egoism. All its highest prizes are reserved for the victors in life's battle, — those, in other words, whose greed and unscrupulousness and dogged materialism enable them to trample upon and plunder weaker competitors; but through this apotheosis of ignoble qualities and capacities society dooms itself to perpetual Philistinism, strife, and vulgarity. Its standards are so low that there can be no honor nor satisfaction in attaining to them. Its favorite pursuits are so frivolous as to put a premium upon imbecility and to handicap merit and capacity. The excess which it fosters, consequently, is never in the direction of true aspiration, but always earthly, sensual, devilish, — such in fact as is typified here in the life and death of Raphael de Valentin, the wretched possessor of the magic skin.

In his Epilogue Balzac has dealt with Pauline so mystically as to confound the critics, who have guessed at the intended meaning as variously as in the case of the Second Part of Goethe's "Faust." Yet there is not any deep mystery in the matter. Pauline Gaudin typifies true and faithful womanly love. She is a foil, both exoteri-

ically and esoterically, to the heartless, cold-blooded Fedora. She is a foil also to the selfishness of Raphael. She stands for all the tenderest emotions and qualities of self-abnegating love. From the first she is seen sacrificing herself to Raphael. When he inhabits the attic in the Hôtel Saint-Quentin, and congratulates himself upon the success of his parsimonious budget, he is really Pauline's pensioner, and would starve to death but for the devoted industry and delicate self-sacrifice of this amiable creature. There is a terrible stroke of irony, drawn straight from human experience, moreover, in the complacency with which Raphael accepts this silent aid; in the transparent form of self-deception indulged by him when Pauline pretends to have found some money while sweeping his room. He tries to persuade himself that the story is credible, but he knows well enough where the coins so opportunely discovered come from, and it is not impossible that he has his suspicions also regarding the unfailing supplies of clean linen and bread and milk. He affects indeed to repay her with instruction, but it is clear that during his tutorial experience the chief benefit remains with him.

She, however, has no reservations for the man she loves. It is enough happiness for such a nature to feel that it is doing good to the object of its affection. Pauline knows well that Raphael is paying his addresses to the Countess Fedora. He, with characteristic masculine obtuseness, makes her his confidant, and wrings her gentle bosom with the eager recapitulation of his hopes and longings. Through all this she never betrays jealousy or petulance. He, she thinks, is so good, so great, so far above her, that it is altogether natural for

him to adore fine ladies, women of title and position, wealthy widows. Nor is there the least self-consciousness about Pauline. She is sometimes depressed, but she does not appear to ask herself why. In Raphael's presence she is simply, naturally happy. She takes what the gods provide, humbly, thankfully, and whether she is thought little or much of she is ready to make any and every renunciation in her power for her friend. When they come together she is the happiest of the happy, and lives only for her Raphael. When he so harshly repels her, moved by his selfish fears and the shrinking of the talisman, no complaint is heard from her; and after he returns from his cruel desertion she utters her grief only in the touching little letter which he finds awaiting him. He has never confided his secret to her. Had he done so she would have protected him far more effectually than he could protect himself. But when in the closing scene she realizes the truth her first impulse is to kill herself, to the end that a cause of danger to him — as she thinks — may be removed. Pauline is a beautiful ideal, and may further be regarded as symbolizing the superior purity and elevation of true womanly love as contrasted with the emotions which fill so large a space in the life of the average modern male egoist. She is not indeed what would be called a strong-minded woman, but Balzac never could perceive the attraction of that kind of character. Like most men of masterful intellect, he believed in feminine qualities especially, and rather shrank from the modern tendency to cultivation of masculine capacities and characteristics in women.

Vast as was Balzac's performance, it could not keep

pace with the prodigious fecundity of his mind. Thus while he had always, during the twenty years of his labor on the "Comédie Humaine," several works in hand simultaneously, at the same time he had as constantly in view several more which he found no time to write. The plan of the "Comédie Humaine" comprised a series to be called "Analytical Studies," but only the "Physiology of Marriage," and some short pieces belonging to this division, were published. It was his intention to follow up "La Peau de Chagrin," with a novel to be entitled "L'Histoire de la Succession du Marquis de Carabas." This work was announced by M. Ph. Chasles in his introduction to "La Peau de Chagrin," and by M. Félix Davin, in his introduction to the "Philosophical Studies," and all that is known of its subject is derived from what is there said, which is to the effect that it was intended to show society at large a prey to the same impotence which devours Raphael in "La Peau de Chagrin," and agonizing under the same real wretchedness, springing from the same fierceness of desire, and disguised by the same external brilliancy, which in the extant work are illustrated in their relation to individualism. It was the purpose of Balzac, first, to describe life as it is, in all its phases, as affected by modern civilization; having accomplished this he proposed tracing effects to their causes; and finally he intended to point out, as far as possible, the social and other tendencies which, resisting the disorganizing influences of the times, constitute the justification for hope concerning the future. This explanation should be kept in mind by those who may be inclined to regard the philosophy of "The Magic

Skin" as pessimistic. In fact when the work appeared some of Balzac's friends raised that very objection. To one of them, the Duchess de Castries, he replied: "I shall defend myself against your charges by one word: this work is not intended to remain alone; it contains the premises of a work which I shall be proud to have attempted, even if I fail in the enterprise." He then refers to the introduction written by M. Philarète Chasles to "La Peau de Chagrin," and says, "You will see by that, that if sometimes I destroy, I also endeavor sometimes to reconstruct." What M. Chasles wrote on the subject is as follows: "Faith and Love escaping from men given over to intellectual culture; Faith and Love exiling themselves to leave all these proud souls in a measureless desert of egoism, penned up in their intense personality, — such is the goal of M. du Balzac's stories." This purpose was defeated by the untimely death of the great writer; but in a few minor pieces such as that entitled "Jesus Christ in Flanders," he has outlined his ideas concerning the renaissance of faith and moral purity his observation led him to look for in the social stratum from which Christianity arose.

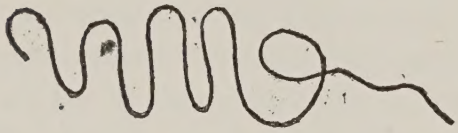
It is quite possible to read "The Magic Skin," simply as a story, without paying any attention to the allegory. This no doubt is the aspect in which it was regarded when it was first published, not only by the public, but by the majority of the critics. Balzac indeed complained in his correspondence, that his types had not been recognized; and this is probable, and even natural. For Balzac so filled all his creations with that white heat of imaginative energy which inspired him, that the

vitalism and the naturalness of his characters give them an individualism, a humanity, altogether unlike the marionettes which figure in ordinary allegories. "The Magic Skin" may consequently be looked upon as merely a clever orientalized tale, the machinery of which is distinguished by peculiar skill of invention and deftness of manipulation. Perhaps it is only those who know the "Comédie Humaine" as a whole, and have followed the growing purposes of the author, who will thoroughly appreciate this book. Yet inasmuch as there certainly is a marked current of tendency at the present time toward serious views of society, civilization, and human relations generally, while there exists a no less distinct reaction against dogmatic materialism and the arrogant presumption of a science which is too often sciolism, it has been thought worth while to offer to such as may care to use it the means of penetrating and apprehending the author's symbolism and his esoteric meaning. It must, however, be said that in "The Magic Skin" we are but on the threshold of Balzac's philosophy. What has been set down here is indeed necessary to a full understanding of the present volume, but the principles here applied constitute only a part of a system, and to grasp that system as a whole "Louis Lambert" and "Seraphita" will have to be read and studied. In the former of these remarkable works will be found a body of thought embracing many ideas and speculations interest in which has been revived recently. That theory of the Will which is referred to so often in "The Magic Skin,' is in "Louis Lambert" fully expounded. It is true that the same theory really underlies almost the whole of

the "Comédie Humaine," but it is in this triad of works that it is elaborated, and each of them is therefore necessary to the comprehension of the others, though, regarded merely as tales, each may be read by itself.

GEORGE FREDERIC PARSONS.

THE MAGIC SKIN.



TRISTRAM SHANDY, CHAP. CCXXXIII.

PART I.

THE TALISMAN.

TOWARD the close of October last, a young man entered the Palais-Royal, at the hour when the gambling-houses opened in conformity with the law, which protects a passion essentially taxable. Without much hesitation, he passed up the staircase of the hell which went by the name of "Number 36."

"Monsieur, your hat, if you please," called out in a sharp, remonstrative voice, a pallid old man, who was squatting in a dark corner behind a railing, and who now rose suddenly, showing a face of an ignoble type.

When you enter a gambling-house the law begins by depriving you of your hat. Is that meant as an evangelical and ghostly parable? May it not rather be a means of clinching an infernal bargain by exacting something of you as a pledge? Can it be intended to force you into a respectful attitude toward those who win your money? Do the police, lurking near every social sink-hole, insist on knowing the very name of your hatter, or your own if you have written it on the

lining? Is it to take the measure of your skull and evolve some instructive statistics on the cerebral capacity of gamblers? On this subject the government is impenetrably silent. But you must plainly understand that no sooner have you made a step toward the green table, than your hat no more belongs to you than you belong to yourself; you are a stake, — you, your money, your hat, your cane, your cloak. When you depart from that hell, PLAY will show you, by a malevolent epigram in action, that it still leaves you something, by returning your hat. We may remark that if it is a new one, you will learn to your cost that in future you must wear gamblers' clothes.

The astonishment of the young man on receiving a numbered ticket in exchange for his hat, whose edges were fortunately a good deal rubbed, proved that his soul was still innocent; and the little old man, who had no doubt wallowed from his youth up among the seething pleasures of a gambling-house, threw him a dull, bleak glance, in which a philosopher would have seen all the horrors of hospitals, the vagrant homelessness of ruined men, police reports of suicides, condemnations to hard labor for life, transportation to penal colonies. This man, whose long, white face had surely no other nourishment than the gelatinous soups of Arcet, was the pale image of Passion brought to its natural end. In his wrinkles lurked the traces of old tortures. He must have played away his meagre salary on the very day he received it. Like an old hack horse on whom the whip makes no impression, nothing made him shudder; the smothered groans of players as they took their hats and went out ruined, their mute impreca-

tions, their dazed eyes, left him unmoved. He was PLAY incarnate. If the young man had stopped to consider this pitiable Cerberus, perhaps he might have said to himself, "Nothing is left in that heart but a game of cards!" He did not listen to this living warning, placed there, no doubt, by Providence, who has stationed Disgust at the door of every evil haunt. He resolutely entered a room where the chink of gold was exercising its dazzling fascination over the eager lust of covetousness. In all probability the young man was driven to this place by that most logical of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's sayings: "Yes, I can conceive of a man rushing to the gambling-table, but not until he sees, between himself and death, only his last penny."

The gambling-houses have only a vulgar poetry about them, but its effect is as certain as that of a blood-thirsty drama. The halls are lined with spectators and players, indigent old men who drag themselves to the place for warmth, gamblers with convulsed faces, bearing marks of orgies begun in wine and ready to terminate in the Seine. But, though passion abounds, the crowd of actors and spectators prevent an observer from deliberately considering, face to face, the demon of play. The scene goes on like a concerted piece in which the whole *troupe* takes part, every instrument of the orchestra modulating its assigned passage. You will see there many honorable men who seek distraction of mind and pay for it as they would for a seat at the theatre, or a luxurious dinner, or as they go to some garret-room and buy at a base price bitter regrets that last them three months. Which of us can fully understand the delirium and the vigor in a man's soul, as he

waits for the opening of these hells. Between the gambler in the morning and the gambler at night, there is all the difference that exists between the indifferent husband and the lover languishing beneath the windows of his love. In the morning come palpitating passion, and want in all its bare-faced horror. It is only in the evening that you recognize the true gambler, the gambler who has neither eaten, nor slept, nor lived, nor thought, so powerfully is he scourged by the whip of his vice, so deeply has the rot of a mania eaten into his being. At that accursed hour you may encounter eyes whose calmness is terrifying, faces that magnetize you, glances which seem to lift the cards and tear the luck out of them.

Gambling-houses never rise to any show of dignity, except at the hour when they nightly open. Spain may have its bull-fights, Rome its gladiators, but Paris boasts of her Palais-Royal, whose rattling balls bring streams of blood for the pleasure of spectators, though the floors are never slippery with it. Cast a furtive glance into the arena; enter — what barrenness! The walls, covered with greasy paper to a man's height, offer nothing on which the eye can rest intelligently, not so much as a nail to facilitate suicide. The floor is worn and dirty. An oblong table occupies the middle of the room. The plainness of the deal chairs, closely set around the green cloth now worn threadbare by the raking in of gold, shows a curious indifference to luxury in men who come here to perish in the quest for it. This human antithesis can be seen wherever the soul reacts powerfully on itself. The lover desires to put his mistress on silken cushions, and

drape her in the soft tissues of Orient, yet for the most part he possesses her in a garret. The ambitious man dreams of the pinnacles of power, all the while abasing himself in the mud of servility. The merchant vegetates in a damp, unhealthy back-shop, and builds a splendid mansion from which his son, taking premature possession, is driven by fraternal litigation. To sum up all in one image, does there exist anything more displeasing to the mind than a house of pleasure? Strange problem! Man, always in opposition to himself, always cheating his hopes by his present woes, and his woes by a future that does not belong to him, puts upon every action of his life the impress of inconsistency and weakness. Here below, nothing appears to be complete but misfortune.

At the moment when the young man entered the room a few players had already assembled. Three bald-headed old men were nonchalantly sitting round the green cloth; their faces, like plaster casts, impassible as those of diplomatists, duly expressed each blunted, sated soul, each heart, long since incapable of throbbing, even when its owner staked the marriage jewels of a wife. A young Italian with black hair and an olive skin was sitting quietly with his elbows on the table, apparently consulting those fatal inward presentiments which continually cry in the player's ear, "Yes," "No." His passionate Southern head seemed injected with gold and fire. Seven or eight spectators standing near were ranged in line, awaiting scenes which the turns of the wheel, the faces of the players, the roll of the money, and the scraping of the rakes were preparing for them. These idlers stood there silent, motion-

less, and attentive, like the populace on the place de Grève when the headsman drops the axe. A tall, lean man in a threadbare coat held a register in one hand and in the other a pin to mark the series of the Red or the Black. Like a modern Tantalus, he was one of those men who live on the verge of all the enjoyments of their epoch, — a miser without a hoard playing an imaginary stake, a species of reasoning fool who consoles his misery by cherishing a chimera, who deals with vice and danger as a young priest with the Eucharist when he says his trial Mass.

Sitting opposite to the bank were two or three of those shrewd speculators, experts in games of chance, who, like old convicts no longer afraid of the galleys, were there to risk three stakes, and immediately carry away their gains; on which, no doubt, they lived. Two waiters were walking nonchalantly about the hall with their arms crossed, looking out every now and then into the garden of the Palais-Royal, as if to show their impassive faces for a species of sign to the passers-by. The banker and the croupier had just cast upon the punters that expressionless glance which stabs a gambler, calling out in shrill tones, "Make your play," when the young man entered the room. The silence became, if possible, more intense; all heads turned with curiosity to the newcomer. Then an almost unheard-of thing occurred; those blunted old men, the stony attendants, the spectators, even the fanatical Italian, experienced, as they caught sight of the stranger, a feeling of nameless terror. A man must indeed be very unfortunate to obtain pity, very feeble to excite sympathy, or very sinister in appearance to cause a shudder in such souls

as these, in a hell where sufferings are hushed, where misery is gay, despair decent. Yes, there were all such elements in the strange sensation which stirred those hearts of ice as the young man entered. Executioners have been known to weep over the virgin heads they were forced to cut off at a signal of the Revolution.

The players could read at a glance in the face of the new-comer the presence of some awful mystery; his youthful features were stamped with despondency; his eye proclaimed the balking of efforts, the betrayal of a thousand hopes; the dull impassibility of suicide seemed to give a wan and sickly pallor to his brow; a bitter smile drew lines around the corners of his mouth; the whole countenance expressed a hopelessness which was terrible to see. Some secret gift of genius scintillated in the depths of those veiled eyes, — veiled perhaps by the fatigues of pleasure. Had debauchery stamped its foul signs upon that noble face, once pure and glowing but now degraded? Doctors would doubtless have attributed the yellow circle round the eyelids and the hectic color in the cheeks to lesions of the stomach or chest, while poets would have recognized in those same signs the ravages of science, the havoc of nights spent in study by the midnight oil. But a passion more fatal than disease, a disease more relentless than study or genius marred that youthful head, contracted those vigorous muscles, and wrung the heart that had scarcely touched the surface of orgies, or study, or disease. As the convicts at the galleys hail with respect some celebrated criminal when he arrives among them, so these human demons, experts in torture, bowed before an amazing grief, an awful wound they had the eyes to

see, recognizing one of their own princes in the dignity of his mute anguish and the elegant poverty of his garments. He wore a frock coat of fashionable appearance, but the junction of his cravat with his waistcoat was too carefully arranged not to betray the fact that he had no shirt. His hands, pretty as those of a woman, were of doubtful cleanliness, and for the last two days he had worn no gloves. If the banker, the croupier, and even the waiters shuddered, it was because the charms of innocence and youth still lingered along the slender, delicate outlines, and among the fair though scanty locks which curled naturally. The face was that of a man of twenty-five, and vice seemed to be there by accident. The vigorous life of youth still fought against the ravages of an impotent lubricity. Darkness and light, annihilation and existence, struggled together, producing a result that was full of grace and full of horror. The young man came into the room like an angel without a halo who had lost his way. For an instant those present, professors emeritus of vice and infamy, like toothless old women seized with pity for a young girl who offers herself to corruption, were on the verge of crying out to him: "Away! come not in!"

He, however, walked straight to the table and stood there, throwing upon the cloth, without a moment's calculation, a piece of gold which he held in his hand and which rolled upon the Black; then, like all strong souls who abhor uncertainties, he looked at the dealer with an eye that was both turbulent and calm. The interest excited by his throw became so great that the old men did not make their stakes; but the Italian,

seizing, with the fanaticism of passion, an idea which suddenly possessed him, plumped his pile of gold on the Red in opposition to the play of the stranger. The dealer forgot to utter the usual phrases which have come by long usage to be a mere hoarse unintelligible cry: "Make your play;" "The game is made;" "Bets are closed." He spread out the cards, and seemed to wish good luck for the new-comer, indifferent as he was to the loss or gain of the devotees of these gloomy pleasures. Each spectator knew that he watched a drama and saw the closing scene of a glorious life in the fate of that piece of gold; their eyes gleamed as they fixed them on the fateful cards; yet, in spite of the attention with which they gazed alternately at the player and at the bits of pasteboard, not a sign of emotion was seen on the cold, resigned face of the young man.

"Red wins!" said the dealer, officially.

A species of strangled rattle came from the Italian's chest as he saw the bank-bills which the banker threw him fall one by one in a little heap. As for the young man he did not comprehend his ruin until the rake stretched out to gather in his last napoleon. The ivory instrument struck the coin with a sharp sound, and it shot with the rapidity of an arrow into the mass of gold spread out before the banker. The young man gently closed his eyes, his lips whitened; but soon he raised his eyelids, his mouth regained its coral redness, he assumed the manner of an Englishman who thinks that for him life has no mysteries, and then he disappeared from the room without asking consolation by a single harrowing look, such as despairing gamblers sometimes

cast on the spectators who line the walls. How many events were compressed into the space of that second; how many things into that single throw of the dice!

"His last cartridge, no doubt," said the croupier, smiling, after a moment's silence, during which he held the bit of gold between his finger and thumb and showed to those about him.

"He is half-crazy now, and he'll be found in the Seine," said a frequenter of the place, looking round at the other players, who all knew each other.

"Bah!" said one of the waiters, taking a pinch of snuff.

"What a pity we did not do as you did, monsieur," said one of the old men to the Italian.

Everybody looked at the lucky player, whose hands were trembling as he counted his bank-notes.

"I heard a voice," he answered, "which cried in my ear, 'The Red wins against his despair.'"

"He is no player," said the banker; "otherwise he would have divided his money into three parts and given himself other chances."

The young man passed out, forgetting to ask for his hat; but the old mastiff behind the rail, having noticed the bad condition of that article, gave it back to him without a word; he returned the ticket mechanically and passed downstairs, whistling *Di tanti palpiti* with so feeble a breath that he himself scarcely heard the delicious notes.

Presently he found himself beneath the arcades of the Palais-Royal, going toward the rue Saint-Honoré, where he took a turn to the Tuileries and crossed the gardens with hesitating step. He walked as though in the

middle of a desert, — elbowed by men whom he did not see; hearing, amid the noises of the streets and populace, but one sound, the call to death; wrapt in a torpor of thought like that of criminals as the tumbril takes them from the Palais to the Grève, to the scaffold reeking with the blood poured out upon it since 1793.

There is something grand and awful, not to be expressed, in suicide. The fall of multitudes of men involves no danger; they are like children tumbling from too low a height to hurt themselves. But when a great man is overthrown he comes from on high, he has risen to the skies where he has seen some inaccessible paradise. Implacable are the tempests which force him to seek peace at the muzzle of a pistol. How many a young soul of talent withers and dies in a garret for want of a friend, for want of a consoling woman; in the midst of millions of beings, masses of men surfeited with gold and satiated with life! Viewed thus, suicide takes on gigantic proportions. Between voluntary death and the fecund hopes which beckon youth in the great city, God alone knows what conceptions, what abandoned ideals, what despairs and stifled cries, what useless efforts, what aborted masterpieces, clash together. Each suicide is a poem awful with melancholy. Where will you find in the whole ocean of literature a book whose genius can equal this brief notice in the corner of some newspaper: —

"*Yesterday, at four o'clock, a young woman flung herself into the Seine from the pont des Arts.*"

Before this laconic Parisian item dramas and romances pale, even that old titlepage of the "glorious King of Kaërnavan imprisoned by his children," — last frag-

ment of a lost book, the mere perusal of which brought tears to the eyes of Sterne, who himself deserted his wife and children.

The young man was assailed by such thoughts as these, which floated in fragments through his soul like shreds of tattered flags across a battle-field. If, for a moment, he laid down the burden of his mind and of his memory, and stopped to gaze at the flowers whose heads were gently swaying in the breeze as it reached them through the shrubbery, soon a convulsion of the life which still fought against the crushing idea of suicide seized upon him; he raised his eyes to heaven and there the sombre clouds, the heavy atmosphere, the gusts of wind surcharged with sadness, once more counselled him to die. He walked on toward the pont Royal, recalling the last acts or fancies of his predecessors. A smile crossed his lips as he thought of Lord Castlereagh satisfying the humblest of wants before he cut his throat, and remembered how the academician Auger looked for his snuff-box and took a pinch on his way to death. He was analyzing these oddities and questioning his own feelings when, as he pressed against the parapet of the bridge to make way for a stout costermonger, the latter slightly soiled the sleeve of his coat, and he found himself carefully shaking off the dust. Reaching the centre arch he stood still and looked darkly at the water.

"Bad weather to drown one's self," said an old woman in rags, with a laugh; "is n't it dirty and cold, that Seine?"

He answered with a natural smile, which showed the delirium of his courage; but suddenly he shuddered as

he saw afar off on the pont des Tuileries the shed which bears the words in letters a foot high, "HELP FOR THE DROWNING." Monsieur Dacheux appeared to him armed with philanthropy and those virtuous oars which crack the skulls of drowning persons, if by chance they appear above water; he saw him appealing to a crowd, sending for a doctor, getting ready restoratives; he read the mournful reports of journalists written between a jovial dinner and the smiles of a ballet-girl; he heard the ring of the five-franc pieces which the prefect of the Seine would pay to the boatmen as the price of his body. Dead, he was worth fifty francs; living, he was only a man of talent, without friends, or protectors, or straw to lie on, or a nook to hide in, — a social cipher, useless to the State, which took no note of him. Death in open day struck him as humiliating; he resolved to die at night and bequeath an indistinguishable carcass to that social world which ignored the grandeur of his life. He therefore continued his way toward the quai Voltaire, assuming, unconsciously, the step of an idler seeking to kill time. As he went down the steps which end the sidewalk of the bridge at the angle of the quay, his attention was caught by the rows of old books spread out for sale upon the parapet, and he came near bargaining for some of them. Then he smiled, put his hands philosophically into his pockets and was about to resume his nonchalant manner, which seemed like a mask of cold disdain, when to his amazement he heard a few coins rattle, with a sound that was positively weird, at the bottom of his trousers-pocket. A smile of hope brightened his face, slid from his lips to every feature, smoothed his brow, and made his eyes and his gloomy

cheeks glow with happiness. This sparkle of joy was like the fire which runs through vestiges of paper that are already consumed by the flames; but the face, like the ashes, grew black once more as the young man rapidly drew out his hand and saw in it three sous.

"Ah! my good monsieur, *la carita! la carita! Catarina!* a little sou to buy me bread!"

A chimney-sweep, whose swollen face was black and his body brown with soot and his clothing ragged, was holding out a dirty hand to clutch the man's last sous.

Two steps off a poor old Savoyard, sickly and suffering and meanly clothed in knitted garments full of holes, called to him in a thick, hoarse voice: "Monsieur, give me what you will, and I will pray God for you." But when the young man looked at him the old man was silenced and said no more, recognizing perhaps on that funereal face the signs of a wretchedness more bitter than his own.

"*La carita! la carita!*"

The young man threw the coppers to the child and the old pauper, as he left the sidewalk and crossed toward the houses, for he could no longer endure the harrowing aspect of the river.

"We will pray God for a long life to you," cried the two beggars.

As he paused before the window of a print-shop the man noticed a young woman getting out of a handsome equipage. He gazed with delight at the charming creature, whose fair features were becomingly framed by the satin of an elegant bonnet. The slender waist and her pretty motions captivated him. Her dress caught slightly on the carriage-step, and enabled him to see a leg whose

fine outline was marked by a white and well-drawn stocking. The young woman entered the shop and asked the price of albums and looked at some lithographs, which she bought and paid for with gold pieces that glittered and rang upon the counter. The young man, standing in the doorway, apparently occupied by looking at the prints in the show-case, exchanged the most piercing glance that the eyes of man could cast against an indifferent look bestowed on all alike by the beautiful unknown. The glance on his part meant a farewell to love, to Woman; but it was not so understood; it did not stir that frivolous female heart, nor make the charming creature blush, or even lower her eyes. What was it to her? — a little admiration, the homage of an eye which made her think to herself that evening, "I looked my best to-day." The young man turned hastily to another pane and did not even glance round as the lady passed him to regain her carriage. The horses started; that last image of elegance and luxury vanished just as he himself was about to vanish from existence.

He walked sadly past the shop-windows, looking without interest at their samples of merchandise. When the shops came to an end he studied the Louvre in the same way, the Institute, the towers of Notre-Dame, those of the Palais, and the pont des Arts. These buildings seemed to wear a sad countenance beneath the leaden skies whose occasional streaks of brightness gave a menacing air to the great city, which, like a pretty woman, is subject to inexplicable changes from beauty to ugliness. Thus Nature herself conspired to plunge the doomed man into an agonizing ecstasy. A

prey to that malignant force whose decomposing action finds an agent in the fluid which circulates in our nerves, he felt his organism slowly and almost insensibly reaching the phenomena of fluidity. The tortures of his agony gave him motions that were like those of the sea; buildings and men appeared to him through a mist, swaying like the waves. He wanted to escape the sharp spasms of the soul which these reactions of his physical nature caused him, and he turned into the shop of an antiquary, meaning to find employment for his senses, and await the darkness in bargaining for works of art. It was, in truth, an effort to gain courage; a prayer for a stimulant, such as criminals who doubt their nerve on the scaffold are wont to make. Yet the sense of his approaching death gave the young man, for a moment, the assurance of a duchess who has two lovers; and he entered the shop with an easy air, and a smile on his lips as fixed as that of a drunkard, — in truth, was he not drunk with life, or rather with death? He soon fell back into his vertigo, however, and continued to see things under strange colors, swaying with a slight motion, whose cause lay no doubt in the irregular circulation of his blood, which boiled at moments like the foam of a cascade and at others was still and dull as the tepid waters of a pool.

He asked to be allowed to look through the establishment and see if there were any curiosities that tempted him. A young lad, with a pair of fresh, chubby cheeks, and reddish hair covered with a sealskin cap, consigned the care of the front shop to an old peasant woman, a species of female Caliban, who was on her knees cleaning a stove whose wondrous handiwork was

due to the genius of Bernard Palissy; then he turned to the stranger and said, with a careless air: —

"Certainly, monsieur, look about you. We keep only the common things down here, but if you will take the trouble to go upstairs, I can show you some fine mummies from Cairo, various inlaid potteries, and a few carved ebonies, — *true Renaissance*, just come in, of exquisite beauty."

These empty commercial phrases, gabbled over by the shop-boy, were to the stranger, in his horrible situation, like the petty annoyances with which small minds assail a man of genius. Bearing his cross to the end, he seemed to listen to his conductor, answering him by gestures or monosyllables; but little by little he won the right to be silent and gave himself over to his last meditations, — which were terrible. He was a poet; and his soul had now come, accidentally, to a vast feeding-ground. Here he was to see in advance the bones of a score of worlds.

At first sight, the rooms presented only confused pictures, in which all works of nature or of art, human or divine, jostled each other. Crocodiles, monkeys, stuffed boas, grinned at the painted glass of the windows and seemed about to bite the busts, seize the lacquers, or spring at the lustres. A Sèvres vase, on which Madame Jacotot had painted Napoleon, stood beside a Sphinx dedicated to Sesostris. The beginnings of the world and the events of yesterday went arm-in-arm with grotesque cordiality. A jack-spit was lying on a monstrance, a republican sabre on a hackbut of the Middle Ages. Madame Du Barry, painted in pastel by Latour, with a star on her head, nude and

floating on cloud, was concupiscently gazing at an Indian hookah, and trying to discover the utility of the spirals that wound toward her. Implements of death, daggers, curious pistols, secret weapons, were flung pell-mell among the implements of life, porcelain soup-tureens, Dresden plates, diaphanous cups from China, antique salt-cellars, and feudal sweetmeat-boxes. An ivory vessel under full sail was floating on the back of a tortoise. A pneumatic instrument was putting out the eye of the Emperor Augustus, majestically indifferent. Several portraits of French magistrates and Dutch burgomasters, as impassible now as they once were in the flesh, looked down with cold and ghastly eyes on this chaos of antiquities. All the kingdoms of the earth seemed to have contributed some fragments of their science, some specimen of their arts. The place was a kind of philosophical compost-heap, where no element was wanting, — neither the pipe of the savage, nor the green and gold slipper of the harem ; neither the Moorish yataghan, nor the Tartar idol. The tobacco-pouch of the soldier was there with the sacred vases of the Church and the plumes of a dais. These wondrous scraps of many worlds were subjected to still further capricious changes by a number of fantastic reflections from the strange objects about them, and by sudden contrasts of light and shade. The ear fancied it caught the sound of strangled cries ; the mind seized the thread of interrupted dramas ; the eye perceived the glimmer of half-smothered lights. A layer of clinging dust had thrown a veil over all these objects, whose multiform angles and strange sinuosities produced a wondrously picturesque effect.

At first, these three rooms, teeming with civilization, with deities, religions, masterpieces, royalties, and debaucheries, with wisdom and with folly, seemed to the young man like a mirror of many facets, each of which represented a world. After this confused and hazy first impression, he wished to select his enjoyment; but by dint of looking, thinking, and dreaming, he was seized with an internal fever, due perhaps to the hunger which gnawed his entrails. The sight of so many national and individual existences, whose proof lay in these tangible pledges which survived them, still further benumbed his senses. The wish that had sent him into the shop was granted; he had left the life of reality and gone upward by degrees to an ideal world; he had reached the enchanted palaces of Ecstasy where the universe appeared to him in broken visions, lighted by tongues of fire, — just as the life of the world to come had flamed before the eyes of Saint John in Patmos.

A multitude of mourning faces, lovely and terrible, darkling and luminous, distant and near, rose before him in masses, in myriads, in generations. Egypt, rigid, mysterious, rose from her sands and stood there, represented by a mummy in its black swathings; or again, it was Pharaoh, burying the multitudes to build his dynasty a tomb; it was Moses, the Israelites, and the desert. He beheld, as in a vision, the solemn world of antiquity. Here, on a twisted column, stood a marble statue, fresh and smooth and sparkling with whiteness, which told him of the voluptuous myths of Greece and of Ionia. Ah! who would not have smiled, as he did, to see upon the dark red ground that brown girl dancing with jocund step before Priapos in the fine

clay of an Etruscan vase? There, opposite, a Latin queen caressed her chimera with effusion. The fashions of imperial Rome were here in all their luxury, — the bath, the couch, the jewel-case of some indolent and dreamy Julia awaiting her Tibullus. The head of Cicero, armed with the power of Arabian talismans, evoked memories of liberated Rome and laid open the pages of Livy. The young man gazed on the *Senatus Populusque Romanus:* the consul, the lictors, the purple embroidered togas, the strifes of the Forum, an angered people, defiled slowly before him like the vaporous figures of a dream. And then, above them all, towered Christian Rome. A painting caught his eye; he saw the Virgin Mary in the midst of angels, on a golden cloud, eclipsing the glory of the sun and listening to the plaints of the sorrowful, on whom she — the regenerated Eve — was smiling tenderly. But as he touched a mosaic made with the lavas of Etna and Vesuvius, his soul sprang away to Italy, to the glowing, tawny South; he was present at the Borgia orgies; he wandered in the Abruzzi; he loved with an Italian love, and grew enamoured of those white faces with the black almond eyes. He shuddered at the thought of midnight interviews, cut short by the cold steel of a husband's weapon, as his eye rested on a dagger of the Middle Ages, whose handle was wrought with the delicacy of lace-work and whose blade was rusty with what looked like blood. India and its religions lived again to Occidental eyes in an idol, coifed with the pointed cap and four raised sides bearing the bells, and dressed in gold and silken stuffs. Near to this grotesque figure, a rug, pretty as the nautch-girl who once,

no doubt, had lain upon it, still gave forth its sandal-wood odors. A Chinese monster with inverted eyes, contorted mouth, and twisted limbs, revealed to the looker-on the soul of a people who, weary of monotonous beauty, have found ineffable pleasure in a wealth of ugliness. But here a salt-cellar from the hand of Benvenuto Cellini brought him back to the bosom of the Renaissance, — to the days when art and license flourished, when sovereigns took their pleasure at executions, when prelates lying in the arms of courtesans decreed chastity for the lower priesthood. He saw the conquests of Alexander on a cameo, the massacres of Pizarro in a matchlock arquebuse, the wars of a disorderly, raging, and cruel religion in the hollow headpiece of a helmet. Then, all at once, the smiling images of chivalry filled his brain, as they sprang forth from a superbly damascened piece of Milanese armor, highly polished, beneath whose visor the eyes of paladins seemed still to glow.

This ocean of inventions, fashions, handicrafts, results, and ruins, were to the stranger a poem without an end. Forms, colors, thoughts were resurrected, but nothing complete was offered to the soul. It devolved upon the poet to finish the sketch of the great painter who had prepared this vast palette, where all the accidents of human life were flung in profusion and as if disdainfully. After thus compassing the world, contemplating nations, eras, dynasties, the young man came back to individual existences. The life of nations was too overwhelming for man, the solitary; he individualized himself once more, and looked for the details of human life.

There lay a waxen infant sleeping, saved from the collection of Ruysch; the enchanting creature recalled to him the joys of his childhood. At the magic aspect of the waist-cloth of a Tahitian virgin, his fervid imagination showed him the simple life of nature, the chaste nakedness of true purity, the delights of indolence, — so natural to man, — a calm existence, young and dreamy, beside a brook, beneath a plantain which bestowed its luscious manna without the toils of culture. But in another moment he was a corsair, clothed with the terrible poetry of Lara, suddenly inspired by the opalescent colors of wondrous shells, excited by a glimpse of corals still smelling of the algæ and the sea-wracks of Atlantic hurricanes. Admiring, further on, the delicate miniatures, the azure and gold arabesques that enriched some precious missal, the toil of a lifetime, he forgot the tumults of ocean. Softly cradled in thoughts of peace, he turned anew to study and to science, desiring the unctuous life of monks exempt from griefs, exempt from pleasures, sleeping in cells, and gazing from their Gothic windows upon the meadows, the woods, the vineyards of their monastery. Before a Teniers he buckled on the knapsack of a soldier, or picked up the hod of a laborer; he wished to wear the dirty smoky cap of a Fleming, to get drunk with beer, play cards in their company, and smile at some coarse peasant-woman of attractive stoutness. He shivered at the snow-storms of Mieris, and fought in the mêlée as he stood before a battlepiece by Salvator Rosa. He handled a tomahawk from Illinois, and felt the knife of the Cherokee as the savage took his scalp. Marvelling at the sight of a Moorish rebec,

he gave it into the hands of a lady of the manor, listened to the melodious ballad, and declared his love at even, beside the hooded fireplace, where her consenting glance was lost in the twilight of the place and hour. He clutched at every joy, seized upon every sorrow, gathered to himself all the formulas of existence as he thus cast himself and his feelings into these phantoms of a pictured and unreal nature, till at last the noise of his own footsteps resounded in his soul, like the distant echoes of another world, or as the hoarse murmurs of Paris reach the topmost towers of Notre-Dame.

As the young man mounted the interior staircase which led to the rooms on the floor above, he noticed votive bucklers, panoplies, carved shrines, wooden images, either hanging to the walls or resting on every stair. Pursued by the strangest shapes, by marvellous creations which seemed to exist on the confines of life and death, he walked as one in a vision. Doubting his own existence, he seemed, like the objects about him, neither altogether dead nor altogether living. When he entered the upper rooms daylight was beginning to fade, but it seemed unneeded amid the dazzling glitter of gold and silver articles which were there heaped together. The costliest caprices of dead collectors, dying in garrets after possessing millions, were in this vast bazaar of human folly. A desk that had cost a hundred thousand francs, bought back for a thousand sous, lay beside a secret lock whose price would formerly have sufficed for a king's ransom. Human genius was there in the pomp of its poverty, in all the glory of its gigantic pettiness. An ebony table, true idol of art, carved

from designs by Jean Goujon, and costing many years of toil, had doubtless been bought at the price of firewood. Precious coffers, articles of furniture made by magic hands, were piled disdainfully one upon another.

"You have millions here!" cried the young man, entering a room which terminated a long suite of apartments carved and gilded by artists of the last century.

"Say thousands of millions," answered the chubby youth. "But this is nothing; come up to the third floor, and you shall see!"

The stranger followed his conductor and reached a fourth series of rooms, where there passed in succession before his wearied eyes several pictures by Poussin, a noble statue by Michael Angelo, some enchanting landscapes of Claude Lorrain, a Gérard Dow that was like a page of Sterne, Rembrandts, Murillos, and Velasquez, sombre and darkly glowing, like a poem of Lord Byron; also antique bas-reliefs, exquisite specimens of onyx and agate cups. A vase of Egyptian porphyry, of inestimable value, with circular carvings representing the grotesque licentiousness of Roman obscenity, scarcely won a smile. The man was suffocating under the wrack of fifty vanished centuries; he was sick with the thoughts of humanity, fainting under luxury and art, prostrated by those strange shapes of the Renaissance which, like monsters begotten beneath his feet by evil genius, seemed to challenge him to endless fight.

The soul in its caprices is like our modern chemistry which assigns creation to a gas; it compounds poisons by the rapid concentration of its enjoyments, its forces, or its ideas. Many men have perished from the con-

vulsion caused by the sudden diffusion of some moral acid through their inward being.

"What does this box contain?" asked the stranger, stopping before a large cabinet filled with the glories of human toil, originality, and wealth, and pointing to a square case made of mahogany, which was hanging from a nail by a silver chain.

"Ah! monsieur has the key to that," said the stout lad, with an air of mystery. "If you wish to see that portrait I will risk asking him."

"Risk?" exclaimed the stranger. "Is your master a prince?"

"I don't know," replied the youth.

They looked at each other for a moment. Then, interpreting the stranger's silence to mean a wish, the apprentice left him alone in the gallery.

Did you ever launch yourself into the vague immensity of space and time as you read the geological works of Cuvier? Carried away by his genius, have you hovered above the fathomless abyss of the past as though sustained by the hand of a magician? Discovering, line upon line, layer upon layer, in the quarries of Montmartre or the gneiss of the Urals, those animals whose fossilized remains belong to antediluvian civilizations, the soul is terrified as it perceives the thousand millions of years and of peoples which feeble human memory, even divine indestructible tradition has forgotten, yet whose dust survives, here on the surface of our earth, in the two feet of soil which give us bread and flowers. Is not Cuvier the greatest poet of our century? Lord Byron reproduces moral throes in verse, but our immortal naturalist has reconstructed worlds from a whitened

bone; rebuilt, like Cadmus, cities from a tooth; repeopled, from an atom of coal, a thousand forests with the mysteries of zoology; and recalled to human knowledge races of giants from the foot of a mastodon. These forms arise and tower up and people regions that are in harmony with their colossal statures. Cuvier is a poet by mere numbers. He stirs the void with no artificially magic utterance; he scoops out a fragment of gypsum, discovers a print-mark and cries out "Behold!" — and lo, the trees are animalized, death becomes life, the world unfolds. After dynasties innumerable of gigantic creatures, after races of fishes and kingdoms of molluscs, the human kind appears, degenerate product of a grandiose type broken perhaps by the Creator. Warmed to life by his retrospective glance, these puny men, born yesterday, have o'erleapt chaos and called the past of the universe into shape, as it were a retrospective Apocalypse, with endless hymns of praise. In presence of this awe-inspiring resurrection due to the voice of one man, the fragment that is conceded to us of this infinite without a name, common to all spheres and which we call Time, — the fragment, the atom, in which we have only a life-interest, — is pitiable. We ask ourselves, crushed as we are beneath these ruined worlds, of what use are all our glories, hates, and loves; and whether, to become an imperceptible speck in the future, the pains of life need be endured. Uprooted from the present we are as if dead — until our valet opens the door and comes up to us to say, "Madame la comtesse replies that she expects monsieur."

The marvels thus spread before the eyes of the young man, revealing the universe itself, filled his soul with a

depression comparable only to that of the philosopher seeking a scientific view of mysterious creations; he longed more than ever to die, and threw himself into a curule chair, suffering his eyes to rove amid the phantoms of this panorama of the past. The pictures glowed, the virgins smiled upon him, the statues wore the deceptive hues of life. In the shadows of the room and of the twilight these works of ages, put in motion by the feverish ferment of his shattered brain, danced and whirled about him; each fantastic image grinned upon him, the eyelids of the personages in the pictures drooped as though to rest their eyes. Each weird shape shivered, moved, detached itself from its surroundings, gravely or frivolously, with grace or clumsiness, according to its nature, its habits, or its composition. It was a witches' sabbath worthy of the Brocken and Doctor Faust.

But these optical phenomena, superinduced by fatigue, by the tension of the ocular muscles, or by the whimsical suggestions of the twilight, could not frighten the young man. The terrors of life were powerless over a soul that was now familiar with the terrors of death. He even lent himself to a sort of ironical collusion with the fantasticalities of this moral galvanism, whose freaks coupled themselves with the last thoughts which the sense of existence still forced upon him. Silence reigned so stilly about him that soon he wandered into a gentle revery, whose impressions, slowly darkening, followed, shadow by shadow, and as if by magic, the slow decline of the light of day. A last gleam coming from the sky sent a ruddy shaft against the inroad of the night; he raised his head and saw a skeleton, swinging

its skull pensively from left to right as though to tell him: — "The dead do not yet want thee." Passing his hand across his brow to prevent sleep, he distinctly felt a waft of chilly air produced by some hairy substance which swept past his cheek, and he shuddered. The casement creaked; he fancied that the cold caress, foretelling the mysteries of the grave, came from a bat. For a moment longer, the dim reflections of the sunken sun allowed him still to see the phantoms by which he was surrounded; then the dead world of things died at once into the darkness. Night, and the hour of death came swiftly. After that moment there was a lapse of time during which he had no clear perception of terrestrial things, — either because he was wrapped in revery, or because he yielded to the drowsiness produced by fatigue and by the multitude of thoughts that rent his heart. Suddenly he fancied he heard himself called by an awful voice, and he shuddered like a man in a feverish nightmare when he fancies he is flung at a bound to the depths of some abyss. He closed his eyes, but the rays of a strong light dazzled them; then he opened them and saw, in the depths of the shadows, a shining red disk, in the centre of which an old man stood erect, turning the rays of a lamp full upon him. He had heard nothing, neither the step, nor the movement, nor the voice of this figure. The apparition seemed magical. Brave men roused from sleep might have trembled before this personage who seemed to have risen from a neighboring sarcophagus. A singular expression of youth, which animated the motionless eyes of the seeming phantom, prevented the young man from thinking the figure supernatural.

Still, during the short moment that intervened between his somnambulic life and his return to actual existence, he was held by the philosophic doubt which Descartes recommends, and then in spite of himself, he fell under the influence of those inexplicable hallucinations whose mysteries our pride condemns and our impotent science strives in vain to analyze.

Imagine a little, lean, and shrunken old man, wearing a black velvet robe, fastened round his loins with a heavy silken cord. A skull-cap, also of black velvet, fitted the head so as to closely frame the forehead, and yet allow the long, white hair to fall on either side his face. The robe was wrapped around the body like a winding-sheet, and allowed no sign of it to appear below the pale and narrow face. Without the fleshless arm, which resembled a stick on which the velvet hung, and which the old man held on high to throw the full light of the lamp upon the stranger, the face might have seemed suspended in mid-air. A gray beard, trimmed to a point, hid the chin of this weird being, and gave him the appearance of those Jewish heads which artists use as types of Moses. The old man's lips were so thin and colorless that some attention was needed to trace the line of the mouth in that blanched visage. His broad and furrowed brow, his wan cheeks, and the implacable sternness of his small, green eyes, bare of lashes and of eyebrows, might have led the stranger to suppose that Gérard Dow's Money-changer had stepped from its frame. The craftiness of an inquisitor, betrayed by the sinuous lines of the wrinkles, and the circular creases on the forehead, showed the depths of his knowledge of the things of life. It was impossible

to deceive him, for he seemed to have the gift of reading the inmost thoughts of the most secluded heart. The ethics of all the nations of the globe, and the wisdom of them, were gathered into that white face, just as the productions of the universe were accumulated in his dusty galleries. Upon it you might read the lucid calm of a god whose eye sees all, or the proud strength of a man who has seen it. A painter could have made of these two expressions and of this one man, by two strokes of his brush, a noble image of the Eternal Father, or the scoffing masque of a Mephistopheles; on the brow he would have found omnipotence, on the lips the vicious jest. The man must have killed all earthly joys within him, while he ground the anguish of human life with the pestle of his power. The young stranger, though himself about to die, shuddered at a fancy that this ancient genie inhabited some other sphere, where he lived alone, without joy, because without illusion, and without sorrows, for he knew no joy. The old man stood erect, motionless, moveless as a star in the middle of a lustrous sky. His green eyes, full of calm maliciousness, seemed to light the moral world as the lamp which he held aloft illuminated the mysterious gallery.

Such was the strange sight which met the young man's eyes when he opened them after swaying, half-unconscious, between thoughts of death and the fantastic images of worlds about him. If for a moment he was bewildered, if he allowed himself to believe, like a child, in some old nurse's tale of his infancy, it is explainable by the irritation of his nerves, and by the strange drama whose panoramic scenes had given him

some of the horrible delights contained in opium. This vision was taking place in Paris, on the quai Voltaire, in the nineteenth century, a time and place where magic was surely impossible. The young man, living near to the house in which the apostle of French unbelief had died, a disciple of Gay-Lussac and of Arago, and contemptuous of the juggling tricks of the day, was simply overcome by a momentary superstition, a poetic fascination, to which men often lend themselves, as much to flee from agonizing truths as to tempt the power of God. He trembled, therefore, before that light and that old man, filled by an inexplicable presentiment of some strange power; the emotion was the same we have all experienced before Napoleon, or in presence of some brilliant man of genius clothed with fame.

"Monsieur wishes to see the portrait of Jesus Christ, painted by Raphael?" asked the old man courteously, in a voice whose clear, sharp resonance had a metallic ring.

He placed the lamp upon the shaft of a broken column, in a manner to throw its whole light upon the wooden box.

At the sacred names of Christ and Raphael, a movement of curiosity escaped the young man, which was no doubt expected by the antiquary, who now touched a spring. Suddenly the mahogany panel slid noiselessly through its groove, and disclosed the picture to the admiration of its beholder. Seeing that immortal creation, he forgot the weird sights of the gallery and the visions of his sleep; he became once more a man; he recognized a fellow-man, a being of flesh and blood, in

his companion, a living man, and in no way phantasmagorical; he felt himself in the world of real things. The tender solicitude, the sweet serenity of the divine face at once acted upon him. Some essence wafted from heaven relaxed the infernal tortures which wrung him even to the marrow of his bones. The head of the Saviour of men seemed to detach itself from the darkness of the back-ground; a halo of brilliant rays shone vividly around the golden hair from which their brilliance issued; beneath the brow, beneath the flesh there was a meaning, an eloquent, convincing power, which escaped in penetrating effluence from every feature. Those coral lips seemed to have just uttered the words of life, and the spectator listened for the sacred echo in the airs; he prayed the silence to give back their meaning, he listened for it in the future, he heard it in the teachings of the past. The gospel was there in the calm kindness of those eyes, to which the troubled soul might fly for refuge. The full meaning of the catholic religion could be read in the gentle, all-comprehending smile which seemed to express the precept in which alone is the true faith summed up: "Love one another." The picture inspired prayer, counselled forgiveness, stifled self, awakened every dormant virtue. Raphael's divine work, sharing the privileges of music, cast the spectator beneath the imperious charm of memory, and its triumph became complete; the painter was forgotten. The illusions of light were on the marvellous picture; sometimes the head seemed to move at a far distance, in the midst of vapor.

"I have covered that canvas with gold," said the antiquary, coldly.

"The die is cast, — it must be death!" cried the young man, coming out of a revery whose final thought had brought him back to his cruel destiny and forced him, step by step, from a last hope to which he had clung.

"Ha, I was right to doubt you!" exclaimed the old man, seizing the stranger's wrists and holding them as if in a vice.

The young man smiled sadly at this distrust and said in a gentle voice: "Fear nothing, monsieur; I spoke of my death, not yours. Why should I not acknowledge a harmless deception?" he added, noticing the old man's anxiety. "While waiting for nightfall, that I might drown myself in the darkness without notice, I came here to see your treasures. You cannot begrudge this last pleasure to a man of science and poetry?"

The old man examined the gloomy face of his pretended customer with a sagacious eye as he listened to him. Either he was reassured by the tones of that sad voice, or he read on the pallid features the awful destiny which had lately made even gamblers shudder, for he loosened his grasp; then, with lingering suspicion, he stretched his arm carelessly toward a table, as if to rest upon it, saying, as he picked up a stiletto, —

"Are you a supernumerary at the Treasury, without perquisites?"

The young man could not refrain from smiling as he made a negative gesture.

"Has your father reproached you for entering the world; or are you yourself dishonored?"

"To live would dishonor me."

"Have they hissed your play at the Funambules? Are you forced to write farces to pay for your mistress's

funeral? Perhaps you have got the gold disease; or, after all, you may only be trying to escape ennui? In short, what weakness is it that bids you die?"

"The cause of my death is not to be found among the common reasons that lead men to suicide. To spare myself the revelation of my untold sufferings — which are indeed beyond the power of human language to express — I will tell you once for all that I am in the deepest, the keenest, the most ignoble poverty. And," he added, in a voice whose savage pride gave the lie to his preceding words, "I ask for neither succor nor consolation."

"Eh! eh!" These two syllables, which the old man uttered like the cry of a hawk, were at first his only answer; then he added: "Without obliging you to beg of me, without causing you to blush, without giving you a centime of France, nor a para of the Levant, a tarant of Sicily, a kreuzer of Germany, a kopeck of Russia, a farthing of Scotland, nor a single one of those sesterces and oboli of ancient times, nor a piastre of the new; without offering you so much as a scrap of gold, silver, copper, paper, or value of any kind, I will make you richer than monarchs, more powerful, more respected than any constitutional king can ever be."

The young man thought him in his dotage and remained silent, torpid, not venturing to speak.

"Turn round," said the old man, suddenly seizing his lamp to throw the light full upon the wall that was opposite to the picture, "and behold that Magic Skin!"

The young man rose abruptly, and showed some surprise when he saw hanging to the wall above the seat

on which he had been sitting, a piece of shagreen, the dimensions of which did not exceed a fox's skin; and yet by some inexplicable phenomenon, this skin projected so vivid a light into the gloom of the gallery that it seemed almost like a miniature comet. The young sceptic went up to the pretended talisman which was to save him from the evils of existence, mentally scoffing at it. Nevertheless, moved by a very natural curiosity, he leaned over to examine the Skin on all sides, and soon discovered a natural cause for its singular luminosity. The black grains of the leather were so highly polished and burnished, its curious stripes were so clearly defined that, like the many facets on a piece of granite, the granulated roughness of this oriental leather presented a thousand little surfaces which vividly reflected light. He explained the phenomenon mathematically to the old man, who merely smiled maliciously. That smile of calm superiority made the younger man of science suspect that he was the dupe of some trickery. Determined not to carry another enigma to the grave, he turned the Skin quickly, like a child eager to learn the secrets of his new toy.

"Ha!" he cried, "here is an impression of what the orientals called Solomon's seal."

"You recognize it?" said the antiquary, whose nostrils emitted two or three puffs of air that expressed more than the most vehement language.

"Is there a man on earth so foolish as to believe that myth?" cried the young man, piqued at this silent laughter, so full of bitter derision. "Do you not know," he added, "that the superstitious East has consecrated the mystic form and the lying characters of

this emblem of fabulous power? You need not tax me with credulity because I recognize it as I might a sphinx or a griffin, whose existence is in a manner mythologically admitted."

"Since you are an orientalist," said the old man, "perhaps you can read this sentence."

He brought the lamp close to the talisman, which the young man was holding with the reverse side toward him, and pointed out certain strange characters embedded in the cellular tissue of the wonderful Skin, as though they had been a part of the animal it had once covered.

"I admit," said the young man, "that I cannot imagine by what process those letters have been so deeply engraved on the skin of a wild ass."

Then, turning eagerly to the shelves covered with curiosities, his eyes appeared to seek for something.

"What is it you want?" said the old man.

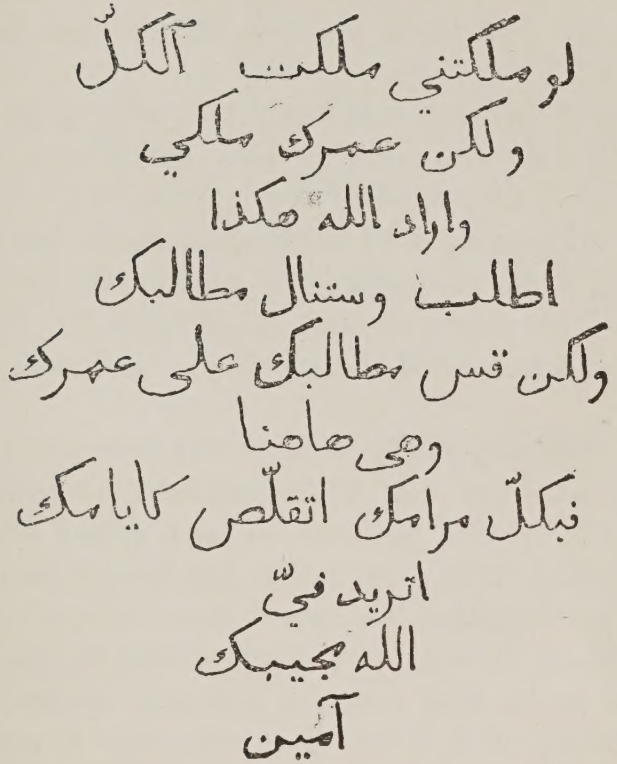
"Some instrument to cut the skin, so as to see whether those letters are stamped, or inlaid."

The old man gave him the stiletto which he still held, and the stranger began to make an incision into the skin at the part where the letters appeared. After lifting a small portion of the leather the letters reappeared below, as neatly and sharply as on the surface.

"The industries of the East have secrets," he said, looking at the oriental sentence with some uneasiness, "which are peculiarly their own."

"Yes," answered the old man, "it is better to put the responsibility on man than on God."

The mysterious words were arranged as follows: —



IF THOU POSSESSEDST ME, THOU WOULDST POSSESS ALL.

BUT THY LIFE WOULD BE MY POSSESSION.

GOD SO WILLS IT.

WISH, AND THOU SHALT OBTAIN THY WISHES.

BUT MEASURE THY WISHES BY THY LIFE.

IT IS HERE.

AT EVERY WISH OF THINE I SHRINK LIKE THY DAYS.

DOST THOU DESIRE ME? TAKE ME.

GOD WILL GRANT THY WISHES.

SO BE IT.

"Ha! you read Arabic?" said the antiquary. "Perhaps you have crossed the deserts and seen Mecca?"

"No, monsieur," said the young man, fingering the symbolic Skin with much curiosity, and finding it almost as inflexible as a sheet of metal.

The old man replaced the lamp on the broken column, glancing at his companion with a cold irony that seemed to say, "He thinks no more about dying."

"Is it a jest, or is it a mystery?" asked the young man.

The antiquary shook his head and answered gravely:

"I cannot tell you. I have offered the terrible power bestowed by this talisman to men gifted with more vigor than you seem to possess, but though they scoffed at the problematical influence it threatened to have over their future destiny, not one was willing to risk binding himself to the fatal compact proposed by the mysterious power, — whatever that may be. I agree with them; I have abstained from it myself, and —"

"Have you never even tried its power?" interrupted the young man.

"Tried it!" exclaimed the antiquary. "If you were at the top of the column of the place Vendôme would you try the experiment of throwing yourself into the air? Can life stand still? Can you take half of death and not the other half? Before you came into my galleries you had resolved to kill yourself, and now, all in a moment, a mystery takes your thoughts and diverts you from dying. Child! every day of your life offers you an enigma more interesting than this. Listen to me. I have seen the licentious court of the regent.

I was then, as you are, in poverty; I begged my bread; nevertheless I have attained the age of one hundred and two years, and I am a millionnaire. Misfortunes gave me wealth; ignorance taught me. I will reveal to you, in a few words, a great mystery of human life. Man exhausts himself by two instinctive acts, which dry up the sources of his existence. Two verbs express all forms in which these causes of death appear; namely, WILL and ACTION. Between those terms and human performance there is another formula, the perquisite of wise men, and to it I owe my longevity. *Will* inflames us, *Action* destroys us; but KNOWLEDGE leaves our weak organism in perennial calm. Therefore desire, or volition, is dead within me, killed by thought; movement, or power, is determined by the natural play of my organs. In a word, I have placed my life, not in the heart that can be broken, not in the senses which can be dulled, but in the brain that never fails and survives all. No excess in anything has worn down my soul, nor yet my body. Nevertheless, I have seen the whole world. My feet have trod the highest mountains of Asia and America, I know all human languages, I have lived under every form of government. I have lent my money to a Chinaman taking the body of his father as security; I have slept in the tent of an Arab on the faith of his word; I have signed contracts in every European capital; I have fearlessly left my gold in the wigwam of a savage; yes, I have obtained all things because — I have despised all. My sole ambition has been to see. To see is to know. Young man, to know is to enjoy intuitively, — to discover the very substance of the

thing done, and to grasp its very essence. What is there, after all, in a material possession? An idea. Conceive therefore of the glorious life of a man who, imprinting all realities upon his thought, transports into his soul the springs of happiness, and draws thence a thousand ideal pleasures stripped of their earthly rags. Thought is the key to every treasure; it bestows the miser's joy without his cares. I have soared above the world and looked down upon it; the pleasures I have had have ever been intellectual. My excesses were those of contemplation in many lands, of peoples, seas, forests, mountains. I have seen all, — but calmly, without fatigue; I have wished for nothing; I have waited for all. I have walked to and fro upon this earth as though it were the garden of a house that belonged to me. What men call griefs, loves, ambitions, disappointments, sadness, are to me ideas which I use in revery; instead of feeling them, I express them, I explain them; instead of allowing them to blast my life, I dramatize them, I develope them; they amuse me as romances, which I read by an inward sight. Having never taxed my physical organs, my health is still robust. My soul inherits the vigor I have not wasted; this head of mine is better filled than even my own galleries. There," he said, striking his forehead "*there* are millions. I pass delightful days looking intelligently back into the past; I evoke whole regions, landscapes, sights of ocean, forms historically sublime. I have my imaginary harem, where I possess women I have never had. I review your wars, your revolutions, and I judge them. Ah! who would prefer to this the feverish, flimsy admiration for a little flesh

more or less colored, for forms more or less shapely? who would prefer the catastrophes of their thwarted will to the glorious faculty of making the whole world present within us, to the vast pleasures of movement untrammelled by the bounds of space or time, to the happiness of seeing all things, comprehending all things, and reaching out beyond this sphere to question other worlds, to hear God? Here," he said in a startling voice, pointing to the Magic Skin, "are the *will* and the *action* united; here are your social ideas, your intemperate desires, your joys that kill, your sufferings that make life too vivid, — for it may be that pain is only violent pleasure: who shall determine the point at which pleasure becomes an evil, and where evil is still a joy? The strongest lights of the ideal world are blissful to the eye, but the softest shadows of material existence wound it. The word Wisdom is synonymous with knowledge, and what is folly if not the excesses of Desire or Will?"

"Yes, but I choose to live in such excesses," cried the young man, snatching the Magic Skin.

"Young man, beware!" exclaimed the old antiquary, with incredible energy.

"I gave my life to study and to thought, and they have not so much as fed me," replied the stranger. "I will not be duped by a homily worthy of Swedenborg, nor by that Eastern talisman, nor by your charitable efforts, monsieur, to keep me in a world where my existence is henceforth impossible. Come, let us see," he added, holding the mystic object with convulsive grasp, and looking at the old man. "I *will* to have a dinner, royally splendid, a banquet worthy of an age which has, they tell us, reached perfection. I *will* that

my fellow-guests be young and witty and wise without prejudices, — joyous to excess! The wines shall flow and sparkle and have strength to intoxicate us for three days. The nights shall be adorned with ardent women. I *will* that frenzied, uproarious Excess bear us in his four-horse chariot beyond the confines of earth and cast us upon the unknown shores, that our souls may mount to heaven or plunge into the mud, — let them rise or fall, I care not which. I command that malefic power to blend me all joys into one joy. Yes, I have need to embrace the pleasures of earth and heaven in one close clasp before I die. I *will* to have the saturnalia of antiquity after we have drunken; songs to awake the dead; triple kisses, kisses that have no end, whose clamor shall sound through Paris like the crackling of flames, waking husbands and wives and inspiring them with the ardor of their youth, even though they be octogenarians —"

A burst of laughter from the mouth of the old man resounded in the ears of the young madman like the roarings of hell, and silenced him so despotically that he held his peace.

"Do you think," said the antiquary, "that my floors are about to open and bring up a table sumptuously served, followed by guests from another world? No, no, rash youth. You have signed the compact; all is accomplished. You have only to wish, and your wishes will be faithfully fulfilled, but — at the cost of your life. The circle of your days, represented by this Skin, will contract and shrink according to the strength and number of your wishes, from the least to the greatest. The Brahman from whom I obtained this talisman explained

to me that it would work a mystic correspondence between the desires and the destiny of its possessor. Your first desire is commonplace ; I could easily realize it ; but I leave that function to the events of your new existence. After all, you wished to die, did you not? Well, your suicide is only postponed."

The stranger, surprised and irritated to feel himself the butt of the singular old man, whose half-philanthropic purpose seemed clearly shown in this last sarcasm, cried out angrily : —

"I shall see for myself, monsieur, if my luck changes during the time it takes me to reach the bridge. If I find that you have not jested at the expense of an unhappy man, I shall wish, to avenge myself for the fatal service you have done me, that you fall madly in love with a ballet-girl. You will then know the joys of a debauch, and perhaps you will become prodigal of all those means of happiness which you have so philosophically acquired."

He left the gallery without hearing the heavy sigh that came from the old man, crossed the suites of rooms and ran down the stairs, followed by the stout shop-boy, who vainly tried to light him as he fled like a robber taken in the act. Blinded by a species of delirium, he did not even observe the extraordinary flexibility of the Skin, which had now become as supple as a glove, and allowed his frenzied fingers to roll it up and put it, almost mechanically, into the pocket of his coat. As he rushed from the door of the shop toward the roadway, he ran violently against three young men who were passing along the quay, arm in arm.

"Brute!"

"Idiot!"

Such were the gracious amenities which they interchanged.

"Hey! it is Raphael!"

"We have hunted everywhere for you."

"What! is it you?"

These friendly phrases succeeded the insults as soon as the light of a street-lamp, swinging in the wind, struck the surprised faces of the group.

"My dear fellow," said the young man whom Raphael in his rapid flight had almost knocked down, "you must come with us."

"Why? what has happened?"

"Come on, and I will tell you as we go along."

Whether he would or no, Raphael was surrounded by a merry band of friends, who linked arms with him, and dragged him toward the pont des Arts.

"We have been chasing you for the last week," said the first spokesman. "At your highly respectable hôtel Saint-Quentin, — whose immovable sign, I must parenthetically observe, keeps its alternate red and black letters as in the days of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, — the old portress told us you had gone into the country; and yet I'm certain we did not look like creditors or sheriff's officers. However, no matter. Rastignac had seen you the night before at the Bouffons; so we took courage, and made it a point of honor to discover whether you were perching on the trees of the Champs-Élysées, or sleeping for two sous a night in one of those philanthropic dens where beggars are put to bed on taut ropes, or whether your bivouac had been set up,

with better luck, in a boudoir. But we could n't find you anywhere, — neither on the police records at Sainte-Pélagie nor those of La Force. Ministries, theatres, convents, cafés, libraries, juries, newspaper offices, restaurants, greenrooms, — in short, every possible hole and corner of Paris, good and bad, — have been explored; we were bewailing the loss of a man gifted with genius enough to compel us to look for him either in a palace or a prison. We talked of getting you canonized as a July hero, and, on my word of honor, we did regret you."

At this instant, Raphael, surrounded by his friends, was crossing the pont des Arts, where, without listening to what was being said to him, he looked at the Seine whose murmuring waters reflected the lights of Paris. Above that stream, at the very spot where he was lately about to plunge into it, the prediction of the old man was accomplished, the hour of his death was suddenly postponed.

"Yes, we did truly regret you," said his friend, still pursuing that theme. "And we wanted you for an affair, an alliance, in which we counted on you in your character of superior man; by that I mean a man who knows how to put himself above everything. Now listen, my dear fellow. The shuffling and the constitutional jugglery that goes on in the royal conjuring-box is worse than ever. The infamous Monarchy that was overthrown by popular heroism was like a woman of bad character, but at least you could laugh and banquet with her; whereas the Nation is a cross-grained virtuous wife, whose frigid embraces we have got to put up with whether we like it or no. Now power, as you very

well know, has betaken itself from the Tuileries into journalism, — just as the Budget changed quarters by passing from the faubourg Saint-Germain to the Chaussée-d'Antin. But here 's something which perhaps you don't know. The government — that 's to say, the aristocracy of bankers and lawyers who make the nation, just as, in the old days, the priests made the monarchy — feels the necessity of mystifying the good people of France with new words and old ideas, in imitation of the philosophers of all schools, and the strong minds of all epochs. The question is now to inculcate a royalist-national public opinion, by proving that we are happier and better for paying twelve hundred millions, thirty-three centimes, to the nation, represented by Messrs. So-and-so, rather than eleven hundred millions, nine centimes, to a king who said 'I' instead of 'We.' To sum it all up in one word, a newspaper, armed with two or three hundred thousand francs, is about to be started, with the idea of setting up an opposition which shall content the discontented, and yet do no harm to the national government of the citizen-king. Now, considering that we make as much fun of liberty as we do of despotism, and quite as much of religion as of scepticism, and that to us country is the capital, where ideas can be exchanged and sold at so much a line, where succulent dinners and theatre-stalls are to be had nightly, where chartered libertinage abounds, and suppers end only on the morrow, and where love goes for so much an hour, like the cabs ; and considering also that Paris will always be the most adorable of all countries, the country of joy and liberty and wit, of pretty women and scamps and good wine, and where, moreover, the

stick of power can never come down too heavily because we are close to those who wield it, — it has been resolved that We, true votaries of the god Mephistopheles, undertake to plaster over the public mind, patch up the actors, nail some new planks on the government hut, physic the doctrinaires, warm up the old Republicans, regild the Bonapartists, and revictual the centre, *provided* we are allowed to laugh *in petto* at kings and peoples, and are not forced to hold the same opinions morning and evening, but are free to lead a merry life à la Panurge, or *more orientali*, couched on delectable cushions. We intend that you shall take the reins of this burlesque and macaronic empire, and therefore we are now conducting you to a dinner given by the founder of the said newspaper, a retired banker, who, not knowing what to do with his gold, is willing to exchange it for our genius. You 'll be welcomed as a brother. We 'll hail you king of the modern Fronde, prince of those searching minds that nothing terrifies, whose perspicacity discovers the intentions of Austria, England, or Russia before Russia, England, and Austria have any intentions. Yes, we 'll proclaim you sovereign of the intellectual forces which have furnished the world with Mirabeaus and Talleyrands and Pitts and Metternichs, in short, all those bold Crispins who have gambled away the destinies of an empire among each other, just as boors stake their kirschen-wasser at dominos. We have already held you up as the most intrepid knight that ever fearlessly encountered Excess, — that splendid monster with whom all untrammelled thinkers insist on struggling; we have even declared that it has not yet vanquished you. I trust you will justify our

praises. Taillefer, the amphitryon, promises to surpass in this banquet the narrow-minded saturnalias of our petty modern Luculluses. He is rich enough to put grandeur into little things, and grace and elegance into vice — Do you hear me, Raphael?" demanded the orator, suddenly interrupting himself.

"Yes," replied the young man, who was less amazed at the accomplishment of his wishes, than surprised by the natural manner in which a chain of circumstances had brought it about. Though unable to believe in occult influences, he could not help wondering at the curious chances of human destiny.

"You say yes as if you were thinking of the death of your grandfather," cried the man nearest to him.

"Ah!" replied Raphael, in a candid tone which brought a laugh from this group of young writers, the hope of rising France, "I am thinking, friends, that we are in a fair way to become great scoundrels. Hitherto we have done our impiety before the shrine of Bacchus; we have questioned life when drunk, and estimated men and things while digesting. Virgin in act, we were bold in words; but now, branded by the red-hot iron of politics, we are about to enter the galleys and lose all illusions. If one does n't any longer believe in the devil, it is allowable to regret the paradise of youth and the days of our innocence, when we devoutly put out our tongues to a priest to receive the sacrament. Ah, my good friends, if we found so much happiness in committing our first sins, it was because remorse gave them spice and flavor, whereas now —"

"Oh! now," said the first spokesman, "there is nothing left but —"

"— but what?" cried a third.

"Crime!"

"That 's a word that carries with it the height of a gibbet, and the depths of the Seine," retorted Raphael.

"You don't understand me; I 'm talking of political crime. For the last twenty-four hours I covet but one career, — that of a conspirator. I won't say that to-morrow my fancy may not have taken wings; but to-night the pale face of our civilization, as flat as the level of a railroad, makes my soul leap with disgust. I 'm seized with a passion for grand emotions, for the horrors of the retreat from Moscow, for the excitements of a Red Rover and the life of a smuggler. As there is no longer a La Trappe in France, I should like to have a Botany Bay, — a sort of infirmary for little Lord Byrons, who, after soiling and rumpling their lives as they do their napkins at dinner, have nothing better to think of than blowing up the nation, cutting their throats, conspiring for the republic, or howling for war."

"Émile," cried the man nearest to Raphael, addressing the speaker excitedly, "on my word of honor, if it had n't been for the revolution of July, I should have made myself a priest, so as to lead an animal life down in the depths of some country region, and —"

"— read your breviary every day?"

"Yes."

"You 're a pretty fellow!"

"Well, don't we read the newspapers every day?"

"Good! for a journalist — but hold your tongue,

we are walking among a crowd of subscribers. Journalism, don't you see, is the religion of modern society, and it is certainly an improvement on the old."

"How so?"

"Its pontiffs are not expected to believe in it — nor the people either."

Chatting thus, like worthy fellows who have known *De Viris Illustribus* these many years, they reached a private house in the rue Joubert.

Émile was a journalist who had won more fame by doing nothing than others had got out of their successes. He was a bold critic, with plenty of sarcasm and dash, and possessing all the virtues of his defects. Frank and jovial, he uttered his epigrams to the face of a friend, whom he would loyally and courageously defend behind his back. He scoffed at everything, even his own future. Always impecunious, he remained, like most men of his calibre, plunged in a state of utter indolence, flinging the makings of a book in a single witticism at the heads of men who did not know how to put a witty saying into their own books. Prodigal of promises which he never performed, he had made his fame a comfortable cushion on which he slept, — running no small risk of waking up some day, an old man in a hospital. For the rest, faithful in friendship even to the scaffold, braggart of cynicism, and simple as a child, he never worked except by fits and starts, and then only from sheer necessity.

"We shall have, to use the words of maître Alcofribas, a famous *tronçon de chiere lie*," he said to Raphael, showing him the stands of rare flowers which perfumed and decorated the staircase.

"I like entrances and halls that are well-warmed and well-carpeted," answered Raphael. "Luxury that begins at the peristyle is too rare in France. I already feel myself a new man."

"We shall drink and laugh once more, my poor Raphael — Ha, ha," he continued. "I hope that you and I will come off conquerors, and walk over the heads of those fellows."

So saying he pointed with a mocking gesture to the company assembled in a salon resplendent with lights and gilding, where they were instantly welcomed by a number of the most remarkable young men in Paris. One had lately revealed a great talent, and had painted a picture that rivalled in fame the art of the Empire. Another had just published a book full of sap, stamped with an air of literary disdain, which pointed out new lines for modern thought. Farther on, a sculptor, whose rugged face bespoke a vigorous genius, was talking with one of those cold critics who, as the fancy takes them, either refuse to see the signs of superiority or imagine them everywhere. Here, the wittiest of our caricaturists, he of the mischievous eye and the satirical lip, was on the lookout for epigrams which his crayon would reproduce. There, too, the audacious young writer who knew the art of distilling the quintessence of political thought and of condensing, as he played with it, the mind of a redundant writer, was talking with a poet whose works would crush all others of the present day if his talent were as strong as his hatred. Both were trying not to speak the truth and not to lie, all the while addressing each other with sweetest flattery. A celebrated musician was satiri-

cally consoling in C flat a newly fledged deputy who had recently had a fall in the tribune, without however doing himself much injury. Young authors without style were grouped with young authors without ideas, prose-writers full of poetry with prosaic poets. A poor Saint-Simonian, simple enough to put faith in his own doctrine, observing these incompleted beings, coupled them charitably, wishing perhaps to convert them into believers of his order.

Besides all these, there were two or three learned men capable of putting nitrogen into the conversation, and several writers of comic drama flinging about them an ephemeral brightness which, like the sparkling of diamonds, gave neither warmth nor light. A few paradoxical beings, laughing in their sleeves at the men who adopted their admirations or their contempt for men and things, were already at work, with that double-faced policy by which they conspire against all systems and take sides with none. The carping critic without real impulse, who blows his nose during a cavatina at the opera, cries "Bravo!" before everybody else but contradicts those who precede him, was present watching his chance to appropriate the sayings of witty men. Among the whole company, probably five had a distinguished future; a dozen were likely to obtain some passing fame; as for the rest they might, like other mediocrities, adopt the famous lie of Louis XVIII., "Union and oblivion." The amphitryon of the feast showed the anxious gayety of a man who is spending six thousand francs. From time to time his eyes turned impatiently to the door of the salon, as if to call up some belated guest who kept him waiting. Presently

a fat little man arrived who was received with a flattering murmur of voices. It was the notary who, that very morning, had drawn up the papers which called the new journal into existence. A footman dressed in black opened the doors of a vast dining-room, where each guest unceremoniously looked for his place at an immense table.

Raphael threw a glance around the salon before leaving it. Assuredly, his wish was so far completely satisfied. Gold and silken stuffs filled the apartment; rich candelabras, holding innumerable wax-candles, brought out the slightest details of the gilded friezes, the delicate chiselling of the marbles, and the sumptuous colors of the furniture; rare plants, in bamboo baskets artistically woven, filled the room with fragrance; even the draperies had an air of unpretending elegance. There was throughout an inexpressible poetic grace, whose charm acted powerfully on the imagination of the penniless man.

"An income of a hundred thousand francs is a very pretty commentary on the catechism, and helps us wonderfully in putting morality into action!" he said, sighing. "Yes, my virtue was never meant to go a-foot. To me, vice is a garret, a ragged coat, a shabby hat in winter, and debts to the porter. Ha! I wish to live in the midst of such luxury as this for a year, six months, no matter how long — and then die. I shall then have known, exhausted, and annihilated a thousand lives."

"My dear fellow," cried Émile, who was listening to him, "you are mistaking the ease of a money-changer for happiness. You would grow sick of wealth as soon as

you found out that it deprives you of all chance of becoming a superior man. Between the poverty of riches and the riches of poverty no true artist has ever hesitated. We must struggle — and you know it. But now prepare your stomach; behold!" he cried, pointing with heroic gesture to the triply sacred, gorgeous, and reassuring spectacle presented by the dining-room of the crapulent capitalist. "That man whom you see there," he said pointing him out, "has actually taken the trouble of amassing his money for us. He is a kind of sponge which the naturalists forgot to include in the order of the polypi, and it is our bounden duty to squeeze him carefully before his heirs can suck at him. Just notice the elegance of those bas-reliefs round the walls? and the pictures, the lustres — what well-selected luxury! If we are to believe envious folks and those who are always searching into the hidden springs of life, that man murdered his best friend, a German, and the mother of that friend during the Revolution. Would you think there were such crimes under the grizzly hair of that venerable Taillefer? He looks like a good fellow. See how the silver sparkles; if he were what they say he is, would n't every ray of its glitter be a dagger in his heart? Pooh, better believe in Mohammed at once! Yet, if the world says true, here are thirty men of honor and talent about to eat the bodies and drink the blood of a family: and you and I, models of candid youth and enthusiasm, we are accomplices in the deed. I've a good mind to go up and ask our capitalist if he is a murderer."

"Not now," cried Raphael; "wait till he is dead-drunk, and then we shall have dined."

The two friends took their places, laughing. At first, and with a glance more rapid than a word, each guest paid tribute of admiration to the sumptuous elegance of the table, white as new-fallen snow, on which the little hummocks of napkins were symmetrically placed. The glasses shed prismatic colors in their starry reflections; wax candles cast an infinitude of light; the viands, served under silver covers, sharpened both appetite and curiosity. Words were few. The guests looked at each other. Madeira was passed round. Then the first course was served in all its glory. It would have done honor to the late Cambacérès, and Brillat-Savarin might have written of it. Claret and burgundy, white and red, were served with regal profusion. This opening of the feast might be likened to the prologue of a classic drama. The second act became somewhat talkative. Each guest, changing his wines according to his fancy, had drunk sufficiently to take part, when the sumptuous course was removed, in excited discussions; pale faces were already flushed, noses were slightly purple, faces burned, and eyes glittered. During this aurora of intoxication, the talk did not pass beyond the limits of courtesy; but, little by little, sarcasms and witty speeches escaped certain lips; then calumny gently raised its serpent-head and protruded its forked tongue; here and there a few crafty souls listened attentively, endeavoring to hold themselves in hand. The second course found the company thoroughly excited. Each man ate as he talked, and talked while he ate, without heed to the quantity of liquid that he drank, so appropriate and perfumed were the wines, and so contagious the example.

Taillefer piqued himself on exciting his guests, and ordered on those terrible wines of the Rhone region, the hot Tokay, and the old, heady Rousillon. Like unbridled post-horses let loose at a relay, the guests, lashed by the fires of champagne impatiently awaited and abundantly served, let their minds gallop into vague discussions to which no one listened, recounted tales that had no auditors, and began over and over again a series of cross-questionings to which there came no reply. Orgy alone had a voice that made itself heard, — the voice of a hundred confused clamors which rose and swelled like the crescendos of Rossini. Then came enticing toasts, boastful speeches, and provocations. All present renounced intellectual capacity to claim that of vats and tuns. It seemed as though each man possessed two voices; and there came a moment when all the masters talked at once, and the footmen smiled. But this medley of words, where paradoxes of doubtful brilliancy and truths grotesquely dressed up jostled each other amid shouts and queries, arbitrary assertions and silly sayings, — like the thick of a combat hurtling with bullets, balls, and grape-shot, — would doubtless have interested some philosopher by the singularity of the thoughts that came to the surface, and amazed a politician by the oddity of the proposed systems. The whole scene was at once a lesson and a picture. Philosophies, religions, moralities of every latitude, governments, indeed, all the great acts of human intelligence, fell under a scythe as sweeping as that of Time; and an observer might have found himself puzzled to decide whether it were handled by drunken Wisdom, or by Drunkenness grown wise and clear-sighted. Carried away by

a sort of whirlwind, these excited minds, like angry waves rushing at a cliff, sought to shake the laws that float civilizations, — unconsciously doing the will of God, who has left good and evil within the bounds of nature, keeping for himself alone the secret of their perpetual warfare. The discussions, growing more and more burlesque and furious, became at last, as it were, a witches' sabbath of intellects. Between the dismal jests of these children of the Revolution over the birth of their new journal, and the vigorous talk of the jovial topers at the birth of Gargantua lay the vast abyss which separates the nineteenth from the sixteenth century. The latter made ready destruction with a laugh; ours laughs amid the ruins.

"What is the name of the young man whom I see over there?" asked the notary, pointing to Raphael. "Did n't I hear some one call him Valentin?"

"What do you mean by Valentin short off?" cried Émile, laughing. "Raphael de Valentin, if you please. We bear sable, an eagle displayed or, crowned argent, beaked and taloned gules; with a glorious motto: *Non cecidit animus*. Let me tell you that we are no foundling, but a descendant of the Emperor Valens, progenitor of the Valentinois, founder of the cities Valence in France, and Valencia in Spain, legitimate heir of the empire of the East. If we allow Mahmoud to sit upon our throne of Constantinople, it is out of pure good nature and lack of soldiers and money." Here Émile drew a crown with his fork in the air above Raphael's head.

The notary reflected for a moment and then began to drink again, making a deprecating gesture, by which he seemed to admit that he could not connect his

practice with the cities of Valence, Constantinople, the sultan, the emperor, or the Valentinois.

"The destruction of those ant-hills called Babylon, Tyre, Carthage, or Venice, inevitably crushed by the foot of any giant who stepped their way, was a warning given to man by some demon power," said Claude Vignon, a species of slave, hired to do Bossuet at ten sous a line.

"Moses, Sylla, Louis XI., Richelieu, Robespierre, and Napoleon, are perhaps but one man, reappearing across the civilizations like a comet across the sky," replied a disciple of Ballanche.

"Why attempt to fathom Providence?" said Canalis, the maker of ballads.

"Providence indeed!" cried the critic, interrupting him. "I know nothing under the sun so elastic."

"But, monsieur, Louis XIV. sent more men to their death in building the aqueduct between Maintenon and Versailles than the Convention guillotined to obtain just taxes, equality before the law, the nationality of France, and the equal division of family property," said Massol, a young man who had become a republican for want of a syllable before his name.

"Monsieur," replied Moreau de l'Oise, a worthy land-owner, "you who drank blood for wine, do you mean to leave men's heads on their shoulders this time?"

"Why should we, monsieur? Don't you think the principles of social order are worth some sacrifices?"

"Bixiou! hi! What's-his-name, here, the republican, declares the land-owner's head must be sacrificed," said a young man to his neighbor.

"Men and events are nothing," said the republican, continuing his theory amid a chorus of hiccoughs; "principles and ideas are all that should be considered in politics and philosophy."

"Horrors! do you mean to say you would n't mind killing your friends for a —"

"Hey! monsieur; the man who feels remorse is the true villain, for he has some idea of virtue; whereas Peter the Great and the Duke of Alba were systems — Monbard, the pirate, was an organization."

"But can't society do without your systems and your organizations?" demanded Canalis.

"Oh, I 'll agree to that," cried the republican.

"Pah! your stupid republic makes me sick at my stomach. Presently we sha'n't be able to carve a capon without running against some agrarian law."

"Your principles are fine, my little Brutus stuffed with truffles. But you are like my valet; the fellow is so possessed with the lust of cleanliness that if I were to let him brush my clothes as much as he liked, I should go naked."

"You are all stupid dolts, — you want to cleanse the nation with a tooth-brush," retorted the republican. "According to your ideas, justice is more dangerous than thieves."

"Hear! hear!" exclaimed Desroches, the lawyer.

"What bores they are with their politics!" said Cardot, the notary. "Shut the door. There 's no science, and no virtue that is worth a drop of blood. If we tried to liquidate truth, ten to one we should find her bankrupt."

"Well, no doubt it would cost less to amuse our-

selves with evil, than to quarrel about good; and for my part I would willingly exchange every word declaimed in the tribune during the last forty years, for a trout, or a sketch by Charlet, or a story of Perrault's."

"And right enough, too, — pass me the asparagus, — for, after all, liberty gives birth to anarchy, and anarchy leads to despotism, and despotism brings back liberty. Millions of beings have perished without being able to make any system triumph. Is n't it plainly a vicious circle, in which the moral world will turn forever? When a man thinks he has made a perfect reformation, he has simply displaced things."

"Oh! oh!" cried Cursy, the writer of farces, "then I propose a toast to Charles X., the father of liberty."

"Why not?" said Émile; "when despotism is in the laws liberty is in the mind and morals, and *vice versa*."

"Then let us drink to the imbecility of the power which gives us so much power over imbeciles," said the banker.

"But, my dear fellow, Napoleon, you must admit, gave us glory," cried an officer of marines, who had never been outside the harbor of Brest.

"Pooh! glory? a forlorn commodity. It costs dear and does n't last. It is the egotism of great men, just as happiness is that of fools — "

"What a happy fellow you must be!"

"The man who invented ditches was doubtless some weakling, — for society only benefits the puny beings. Those who stand at the two extremities of the moral world — the savage and the thinker — have an equal horror of property."

"Fine talk!" cried Cardot. "If there were no property how could we make conveyances?"

"These green peas are ideally delicious — "

"And the curate was found dead in his bed, the very next day — "

"Dead! who is talking of death? don't joke about it. I've got an uncle — "

"And you are resigned to lose him?"

"That's not a fair question."

"Listen to me, gentlemen, and I'll tell you *how to kill an uncle.* [Hush! Listen!] Have an uncle, short and fat, and seventy, at least; that is the best kind of uncle [sensation]. Make him, under any pretence you please, eat a Strasburg pie — "

"Eh! but my uncle is tall and lean and miserly and sober."

"Oh, those uncles are monsters who misuse life."

"Well," said the instructor in uncles, continuing, "tell him, while he is digesting, that his banker has failed — "

"Suppose he survives it?"

"Then send him a pretty girl — "

"Malibran's voice has lost two notes."

"No, monsieur."

"Yes, monsieur."

"Ho! ho! yes and no; that's the history of all discussions, religious, political, and literary; they never get beyond that. Man is a buffoon, who dances at the edge of a precipice."

"To listen to you, one would think I was a fool."

"On the contrary, that's precisely because you don't listen to me."

"Education! what nonsense it is! Monsieur Heineffettermach declares there are more than one thousand million printed volumes, and man's life is only long enough to let him read one hundred and fifty thousand. And so, explain to me, if you please, the meaning of that word 'education.' Some people think it consists in knowing the names of Alexander's horse, of the dog Bérécillo, of the Seigneur des Accords, and ignoring that of the man to whom we owe the floating of wood and the making of porcelain. 'Education' to others means the capacity to burn a will and live like honest folk, beloved and respected, instead of stealing a watch for the tenth time with the five aggravating circumstances, and dying on the place de Grève hated and dishonored."

"Will Nathan continue his paper?"

"Ah! his contributors have such wit."

"How about Canalis?"

"A great man; don't talk of him."

"You are drunk."

"The immediate result of a constitution is to lower the level of intelligence. Arts, sciences, public buildings, are all eaten into by an awful selfishness, the leprosy of our day. Take your three hundred bourgeois seated on benches; every man of them thinks of planting poplar-trees, and of nothing else. Despotism does great things illegally, liberty won't trouble herself to do legally even the smallest things —"

"The present system of education," said a partisan of despotic power, "turns out human minds like five-franc pieces from the mint. Individuality disappears among a people who are flattened to one level by education."

"And yet, is n't the very object of society to procure happiness for all?" demanded the Saint-Simonian.

"When you get an income of fifty thousand francs you won't think about the happiness of the masses. But if you are captivated by the noble passion for humanity, go to Madagascar; there 's a nice little people all ready to your hand, brand-new, to Saint-Simonize and classify and label; but here in France we all live in our particular cells, as a key turns in its own lock. Porters are porters, and ninnies are fools, without needing a diploma from a college of Fathers; ha! ha!"

"You are a Carlist!"

"Why should n't I be? I like despotism; it shows a contempt for the human race. I can't hate kings, they are so amusing. To sit on a throne in a chamber about thirty million leagues from the sun, do you call that nothing?" —

"But let us take a larger view of civilization," said a man of science, who had undertaken, on behalf of an inattentive sculptor, a disquisition on the origin of society and autochthonous peoples. "At the birth of nations power was, as it were, material, single, brutal; then, as aggregation took place, governments were carried on by the decomposition, as it were, of the primitive power. For instance, in remote antiquity power was theocratic; the priest held the sword and the censer. Later, there were two sacerdotal powers: the pontiff, and the king. To-day our society, the last extreme of civilization, has distributed power among a number of combined forces, called by such names as industry, thought, wealth, speech. No longer possess-

ing unity, power tends toward a social dissolution to which there is no barrier except self-interest. We no longer rest upon religion nor upon material strength, but upon intellect. Is theory as powerful as the sword? is discussion as strong as action? there 's the question."

"Intellect has killed everything," cried the Carlist. "Absolute liberty drags nations to suicide; they are sick and tired of success, like a British millionnaire."

"What next? Where will these ideas of yours land you? You ridicule all power, and what is that but the worn-out vulgarity of denying God? You have no beliefs. The age is like an old sultan given over to debauchery; and that 's why your Lord Byron, in final despair of poetry, chanted the passions of crime."

"Do you know," remarked Horace Bianchon, who was now completely drunk, "that one dose more or less of phosphorus makes a man of genius or a villain, a wit or an idiot, a virtuous man or a criminal?"

"How can you talk thus of virtue," cried De Cursy; "of virtue, the key-note of dramas, the backbone of theatres, the foundation of all courts of justice?

"Hold your tongue, animal! Your virtue is like Achilles without his heel," retorted Bixiou.

"Your health!"

"Will you bet that I can drink a bottle of champagne at a flash?"

"What a flash of wit!" sneered Bixiou.

"They are as drunk as plough-boys," said a young man who tipped a good deal of his wine into his waistcoat.

"Yes, monsieur; the government of the day is the art of putting public opinion into power."

"Public opinion! the most depraved of all prostitutes! To hear you men of morality and politics, we must believe in your dogmas against every law of nature and conviction and conscience. Bah! all is true, and all is false. If society gives us down pillows, she makes it up by gout; just as she puts up law to modify justice, and colds in the head as a set-off against cashmere shawls —"

"Monster!" cried Émile, interrupting the misanthropist, "what do you mean by slandering civilization in presence of such wines, such viands, such delicacies up to our very chins? Put your teeth into this venison, but don't bite your own mother."

"Is it my fault, pray, that Catholicism has put a million of gods into a sack of flour, that all republics end in a Robespierre, that royalty hangs between the assassination of Henri IV. and the decapitation of Louis XVI., or that liberalism turns into a La Fayette?"

"Did you embrace him in July?"

"No."

"Then hold your tongue, sceptic."

"Sceptics are conscientious men."

"They have no conscience."

"What do you mean? They have two."

"Discounting heaven! there you are with your commercial ideas. The ancient religions were only the happy development of physical pleasure; but we have developed hope and a soul; that is progress."

"Hey! my good friends; what can you expect of an age stinking with politics?" asked Nathan. "What

was the fate of the 'King of Bohemia and his seven castles?' the wittiest conception — "

"That?" screamed the critic, from the other side of the table, — "phrases, drawn for luck out of a hat; a book written in a madhouse — "

"You 're a fool!"

"You 're a scoundrel!"

"Oh, oh!"

"Ah, ah!"

"They 'll fight."

"No, they won't."

"To-morrow, monsieur."

"At once," replied Nathan.

"Come, come, you are both honorable men."

"You 're another," said the aggressor.

"Neither of them can stand upright."

"Can't I?" said the bellicose Nathan, attempting to get upon his feet like a stag-beetle. He threw a stupid look round the table, then, as if exhausted by the effort, he fell back in his chair, dropped his head, and was silent.

"Would n't it have been funny," said the critic to the man next him, "if I had fought a duel about a book I never read?"

"Émile, look out for your coat, your neighbor is turning pale."

"Kant, monsieur? Only a balloon sent up to amuse fools. Materialism and spiritualism are two pretty battledores with which humbugs toss about the same shuttlecock. Say that God be in all, according to Spinoza, or that all comes from God, according to Saint Paul, — idiots! opening and shutting a door,

is n't that the same action? Does the egg come from the fowl, or the fowl from the egg? answer me that, for it is the whole of science."

"Ninny!" cried the man of science, "the question you ask is chopped in two by a fact."

"What fact?"

"The chairs of professors were not made for philosophy, but philosophy for the chairs. Put on your spectacles and read the budget."

"Thieves!"

"Imbeciles!"

"Scoundrels!"

"Dupes!"

"Where else but in Paris, would you find such a brilliant and rapid interchange of thought," cried Bixiou, in a deep bass voice.

"Come, Bixiou, do us a classic farce."

"What shall it be; the nineteenth century?"

"Yes, yes."

"Listen all."

"Silence!"

"Put down the soft pedals."

"Hold your tongue, blockhead."

"Give him some wine, and that will keep him quiet."

"Go on, Bixiou."

The artist buttoned up his black coat, put on his gloves and an elderly grimace, intended to represent the Revue des Deux-Mondes; then he squinted — but the noise drowned his voice, and it was impossible to catch a word of his allocution. If he did not represent the nineteenth century, he at least fully represented the Revue, for he himself had no idea what he meant.

The dessert was served as if by magic. In the centre of the table stood a large épergne in gilded bronze, from the workshops of Thomire. Tall figures of the conventional forms of ideal beauty, held up or supported baskets and vases of strawberries, pine-apples, white and purple grapes, fresh dates, rosy peaches, oranges from Sétubal, pomegranates, fruits from China, in short, all the surprises of luxury, the miraculous productions of hothouses, the choicest and most appetizing delicacies. The colors of this gastronomic picture were heightened by the shimmer of the porcelain baskets with their glittering lines of gold, and the sparkle of the cut glass vases. Graceful as the light fringes of ocean, ferns and mosses drooped over landscapes by Poussin, copied on the Sèvres. A German principality was worth less than this piece of ostentation. Silver, mother-of-pearl, gold, and prismatic glass, were disposed about the table for the final course; but the dulled eyes of the guests and the wordy fever of their intoxication prevented them from having more than a vague idea of the fairy scene, which was indeed worthy of an oriental tale. The wines of the dessert added their own fiery perfumes, like powerful philters or magic vapors that generated a sort of intellectual mirage, chaining the feet and enervating the hands. The beautiful pyramid was pillaged, voices rose high, the tumult swelled; words became indistinct, glass was shivered to fragments, and bursts of horrid laughter exploded like cartridges. Cursy seized a horn and sounded a fanfare. It was like a signal from the devil. The assemblage became delirious, howled, whistled, sang, shouted, roared, and snarled. One might almost

have smiled to see these men, by nature gay, now driven by their enjoyments into a tragic mood that was worthy of the pages of Crébillon. Some were telling their secrets to ears that did not listen. Gloomy faces wore the smile of a ballet-girl, when she finishes a pirouette. Claude Vignon was dancing like a bear to a fife. Intimate friends were fighting. The likenesses to animals that came out on these human faces, phenomena which have often been remarked on by physiologists, appeared vaguely in their gestures and in the movement of their bodies. They were an open book, if only some Bichat, cool, sober, and fasting, had been there to read it. The master of the feast, feeling that he was drunk, did not venture to rise, but sat still, encouraging the follies of his guests by a fixed smile, and trying all the while to maintain an air of decency and good-fellowship. His broad face, now red and blue and almost purple, was horrible to behold; it associated itself with the movement about him by a motion that resembled the rolling and pitching of a ship at sea.

"Did you murder them?" Émile suddenly asked him.

"The death penalty is to be abolished in honor of the Revolution of July, so they say," replied Taillefer, raising his eyebrows with a look that was both shrewd and stupid.

"But don't you sometimes see them in your dreams?" added Raphael.

"There are limits to that," said the murderer, full of gold.

"And on his tomb," cried Émile, sardonically, "shall

these words be engraved by the undertaker, 'Stranger, bestow a tear upon his memory.' Oh!" he continued, "I'd give a hundred sous to a mathematician who would demonstrate by an algebraic equation the certainty of hell."

He flung a five-franc piece in the air crying out, "Heads for God!"

"Don't look," cried Raphael, seizing the coin, "who knows? luck is so queer."

"Alas!" said Émile, with an air of burlesque sadness. "I don't know where to set my feet between the geometry of scepticism and the Pope's *Pater noster*. Well, no matter, let us drink. 'Drink' is, I believe, the oracle of the Divine Bottle, and serves as the conclusion to Pantagruel."

"We owe everything to the *Pater noster*," answered Raphael, — "our arts, our public monuments, perhaps our sciences; and above all, modern government, in which society, vast and teeming as it is, is marvellously represented by five hundred intellects, whose forces oppose and neutralize each other, leaving all power to Civilization, the colossal queen who has dethroned the King, that ancient and terrible figure, that species of false destiny created by man to stand between himself and God. In presence of so many and vast accomplished things atheism is like a skeleton unable to beget. What say you?"

"I reflect upon the seas of blood shed by catholicism," said Émile, coldly. "It has drawn from our hearts and our veins a second deluge. But what matters it? Every thinking man must march under Christ's banner. He alone has consecrated the triumph

of mind over matter; he alone has revealed to our souls the intermediate world which separates us from God."

"You believe that?" answered Raphael, with the indefinable smile of intoxication. "Well, not to commit ourselves, let us drink the famous toast: *Diis ignotis!*"

And they emptied their goblets of science, of carbonic acid gas, of perfume, poetry, and scepticism.

"If the gentlemen will pass into the salon," said the maître d'hôtel, "coffee will be served."

By this time nearly all the guests were wallowing in the delights of that limbo where the lamps of the mind go out, where the body, delivered of its tyrant, abandons itself to the delirious joys of liberty. Some, who had reached the maximum of drunkenness, were gloomy, and strove laboriously to seize some thought that might prove to them their own existence; others, sunk in the atrophy of an overloaded digestion, refused to stir. The chorus of a song was echoing like the twang of some mechanism forced to play out its soulless numbers. Silence and tumult were oddly coupled. Nevertheless, when the sonorous voice of the maître d'hôtel, in default of that of his master, was heard announcing fresh delights, the guests rose and advanced half-dragging, half-supporting each other, until they stopped for an instant, charmed and motionless, at the door of the salon.

The enjoyments of the banquet paled before the enticing spectacle now presented to the most susceptible of their senses. Round a table covered with a silver gilt service, and beneath the sparkling light of many candles clustering above them, stood a number of

women, whose sudden appearance made the eyes of the bewildered guests shine like diamonds. Rich were their dresses and their jewels, but richer still their dazzling beauty, before which all other splendors of the palace paled. The passionate eyes of these girls, bewitching as fairies, were more vivid than the floods of light which brought out the shimmer of satin stuffs, the whiteness of marbles, and the delicate outline of bronze figures. The senses of the guests glowed as they caught sight of the contrasts in their attitudes and in the decoration of their heads, all diverse in attraction and in character. They were like a hedge of flowers, strewn with rubies, sapphires, and coral; bands of black were round the snowy throats, light scarfs floated from them like the beams of a beacon, turbans were proudly worn, and tunics, modestly provocative — in short, the seraglio offered seductions to all eyes, and pleasures for all caprices. Here, a danseuse, charmingly posed, seemed as though unveiled beneath the undulating folds of a cashmere. There, a diaphanous gauze, or an iridescent silk hid, or revealed, mysterious perfections. Slender little feet spoke of love, fresh and rosy lips were silent. Delicate and decent young girls, false virgins, whose pretty hair gave forth a savor of religious innocence, seemed to the eye like apparitions which a breath might dispel. Aristocratic beauties, with haughty eyes, indolent and slender and graceful, bent their heads as though they still had regal favors to dispense. An Englishwoman with a chaste fair face, descending, as it were, from the clouds of Ossian, was like an angel of melancholy, or an image of remorse fleeing from a crime. The Parisian woman, whose whole

beauty lies in a grace indescribable, vain of her dress and her wit, armed with her all-powerful weakness, supple and hard, siren without heart and without passion, yet knowing how by mere skill to create the treasures of passion, and to simulate the tones of the heart, was not wanting in this dangerous bevy; nor yet the Italian, tranquil apparently and conscientious in her delights; nor the superb Norman woman of magnificent shape; nor the black-haired Southern beauty, with her large and well-formed eye. An observer might have thought them the beauties of Versailles called together by Lebel, who, having spent the day in preparing their charms, were now like a troop of Circassian slaves aroused at the voice of a merchant to display them. They appeared confused and bashful; and clustered around the table like bees murmuring about a hive. This timid embarrassment, which seemed like reproach and coquetry combined, was either a calculated form of seduction, or an involuntary shame-facedness. Perhaps a feeling which womanhood can never completely cast off bade them snatch the mantle of virtue to give greater charm and piquancy to vice.

For an instant the intentions of old Taillefer seemed to miss their mark. These reckless men were, for a moment, subjugated by the majestic dignity that invests a woman. A murmur of admiration like soft music was heard. Love had not gone hand in hand with drunkenness. In place of stormy passions, the guests, overcome by momentary weakness, abandoned themselves to rapturous ecstasy. Touched in their sense of poetry, which is forever dominant, artists studied the delicate tones of these chosen beauties. A philosopher,

roused by a thought due, perhaps, to the carbonic acid disengaged from the fumes of champagne, shuddered as he thought of the miseries that had brought those women there, — women once worthy of the purest homage. Each of them, no doubt, had some awful drama to relate. Nearly all carried about with them the tortures of hell, dragging after them the memory of faithless men, of promises betrayed, of joys all too bitterly paid for by distress.

The guests approached these women politely, and various conversations, according to the characters of each, began; groups were formed; the scene was like that of a salon in good society where the matrons and the young girls offer coffee and liqueurs to gourmands troubled by a recalcitrant digestion. But presently bursts of laughter broke forth, the noise increased, voices were raised. Revelry, quelled for a moment, now lifted its head and threatened to arise. These alternations of silence and noise bore a vague resemblance to a symphony of Beethoven.

The two friends, seated on a luxurious sofa, were presently approached by a tall, well-proportioned girl of superb bearing, whose regular but keen and impetuous features compelled attention by their vigorous contrasts. Her black hair, curling luxuriantly, seemed to have undergone already the combats of love, and fell in loose locks upon her shoulders, whose perspectives were attractive to the eye. The skin, of an ivory whiteness, brought out the warm tones of her vivid coloring. Her eyes, fringed with long lashes, flashed flames and sparks of love. The red, moist mouth, half-open, invited kisses. The girl's figure was powerfully

built, but amorously elastic; her bosom and arms were developed like the noble figures of the Caracci; nevertheless she was active and supple with the vigorous agility of a panther. Though laughter and frolic wantonness must have been familiar to her, there was something alarming in her eyes and smile. Like a prophetess controlled by a demon, she astonished rather than pleased those whom she addressed. All expressions rushed in turn and like lightning across her mobile face. Perhaps she might have fascinated a sated mind, but young men would have feared her. She was like a colossal statue fallen from the pediment of a Greek temple, sublime at a distance, but coarse on nearer view. And yet that dangerous beauty was fit to rouse the impotent, that voice could charm the deaf, those looks reanimate a skeleton. Émile compared her vaguely to a tragedy of Shakspeare, a wonderful arabesque, where joy shrieks, where love has I know not what of savagery, where the magic of grace and the fires of happiness succeed the wild tumults of anger; a monster who can bite and fondle, laugh like a demon, weep as the angels, improvise in a single embrace all the seductions of womanhood, except the sighs of sadness and the pure transporting modesty of a virgin, — and then, in another instant, roar, and tear her bosom, and destroy her passion and her lover and herself like an insurrectionary mob.

She wore a robe of crimson velvet, and advanced to the two friends, treading heedlessly underfoot the scattered flowers already fallen from the heads of her companions, and holding out with disdainful hands a silver tray. Proud of her beauty, proud perhaps of her

vices, she exhibited a white arm brilliantly relieved against the velvet. She stood there like the queen of pleasure, like an image of human joy, the joy that dissipates the hoarded treasures of generations, that laughs in presence of the dead, that mocks at age, dissolves pearls, casts away thrones, transforms young men to old ones, and makes old men young, — that joy permitted only to giants among men when wearied of power, tried in thought, or to whom war has become an amusement.

"What is your name?" Raphael asked her.

"Aquilina."

"Ha, ha! do you come from 'Venice Preserved'?" cried Émile.

"Yes," she answered. "The popes take new names when they mount above the heads of men; and so I took another when I rose above the heads of women."

"And have you, like your patron lady, a noble and terrible conspirator who loves you enough to die for you?" said Émile quickly, roused by the poetic suggestion.

"I had," she answered, "but the guillotine was my rival. That is why I always wear some scarlet frippery — lest my joy should go too far."

"Oh! if you let her tell you the history of the four young men of La Rochelle, there will be no end to it. Hold your tongue, Aquilina! Does n't every woman mourn a lover? — though they don't all, like you, have the satisfaction of losing them on a scaffold. For my part, I 'd rather think of mine sleeping in a pit at Clamart than in my rival's arms."

These words were said in a soft, melodious voice by

the prettiest, daintiest, most innocent little creature that ever issued from an enchanted egg at the touch of a fairy's wand. She had approached them noiselessly, and they now saw her fragile form and delicate face, with its ravishing blue eyes full of modesty, and the fresh, pure brow. A naiad escaped from her mountain stream were not more timid, more fair, more simple than this young girl, who seemed to be about sixteen years old, ignorant of love, ignorant of evil, unknowing of the storms of life, and as if petitioning angels to recall her to the skies before her time. In Paris alone do we meet with such creatures, whose candid faces mask beneath a brow as pure and tender as the petal of a daisy the deepest depravity and the subtlest vice. Émile and Raphael accepted the coffee which she poured into the cups that Aquilina held, and then began to question her. Little by little she transfigured to the eyes of the two poets, as by a baleful allegory, an aspect of human life, — holding up, in contrast to the fierce and passionate expression of her imposing companion, a picture of cold corruption, voluptuously cruel, thoughtless enough to commit a crime, strong enough to laugh at it; a species of devil without a heart, who punishes tender and affluent souls for experiencing the feelings of which she is deprived; never without some cant of love to sell, a tear for the coffin of a victim, and a laugh at night over a bequest. Poets would have admired Aquilina; but the whole world would have fled Euphrasia. The one was the soul of vice; the other was vice without a soul.

"I should like to know," Émile said to the pretty creature, "if you ever think of the future?"

"The future?" she answered, laughing. "What do you call the future? Why should I think about a thing that doesn't yet exist? I never look either forward or back. Don't you think that one day at a time is enough for anybody? Besides, we all know what the future is; it is the hospital."

"How can you look forward to the hospital and not try to avoid it?" cried Raphael.

"What is there so dreadful in the hospital?" asked the terrible Aquilina. "If we are neither wives nor mothers, if old age puts black stockings on our legs and wrinkles in our faces, and blasts all that is left of a woman within us, and kills our welcome in the eyes of our friends, where else can we go? You see nothing in us then but original sin on two legs, cold, withered, stiff, and rattling like the leaves in autumn. Our prettiest furbelows become mere rags, the ambergris that perfumes our boudoirs gets the odor of the grave, and smells like a dead body; and then, if there 's a heart in this bit of mud you insult it; you will not even let it keep a memory. Whether we are then in a great mansion taking care of dogs, or in a hospital sorting bandages, is n't life for us exactly the same thing? Suppose we tie up our white hairs in checked handkerchiefs, or hide them under laces; sweep the streets with a broom or the steps of the Tuileries with our satin petticoats; sit at ease by a gilded fireplace, or keep warm over the cinders in an earthen pot; see the play at the opera or on the place de Grève, what difference is there for us?"

"*Aquilina mia*, you never said greater truth than that in the midst of all your troubles," returned Euphrasia. "Yes, cashmeres, and perfumes, and gold,

and silk, and luxury, and all that shines and gives pleasure is only fit for youth. Time alone can get the better of follies, but happiness meantime absolves them. You laugh at what I say," she cried, with a venomous look at the two young men; "but am I not right? I'd rather die of pleasure than disease. I have n't a mania for perpetuity, nor much respect for the human species, seeing what God has let it come to. Give me millions and I'll spend them; I will not keep a penny for next year. Live to please and reign, — that is the teaching of every pulse in my body. Society bears me out; is n't it all the time furnishing means for me to dissipate? Why else does the good God give me every morning the money for what I dispense at night? Why else do you build us hospitals? We are certainly not placed between good and evil to choose what hurts and bores us; and therefore should n't I be a great fool not to enjoy myself?"

"How about others?" said Émile.

"Others? oh, let them manage for themselves. I'd rather laugh at their sufferings than cry for my own. I defy a man to cause me an instant's pain."

"What must you have suffered before you came to such thoughts!" said Raphael.

"I have been deserted for money; yes, I," she said, taking an attitude that showed off all her seductions. "And yet I had passed nights as well as days in working to feed my lover. I will no longer be the dupe of smiles, nor of any promise; I mean to make my life one long festivity."

"But," cried Raphael, "happiness can come only through the soul."

"Well," said Aquilina, "is n't it happiness to be admired and flattered; to triumph over all other women, even the virtuous ones, and crush them with our beauty and our luxury? We have more of life in one day than those good women in ten years, and that 's the whole of it."

"What is there so odious as a woman without virtue?" Émile said to Raphael.

Euphrasia flung them a viperous look, and answered with inimitable irony, "Virtue! we leave that to the frights and the hunchbacks; what would they be without it, poor things!"

"Come, be silent!" said Émile; "don't talk of things you know nothing of."

"Don't I know anything!" replied Euphrasia. "To give one's self all one's life to a hated being; to bring up children who desert you, and to say 'Thank you' when they stab you in the breast, — those are the virtues you command a woman to have! And then, to compensate her for her self-denials, you try to seduce her and heap sufferings on her; if she resists, you compromise her. A fine life that! better be free and love those who please us, and die young."

"But are you not afraid of the penalty?"

"No," she replied. "Instead of mixing my pleasures with griefs, I prefer to cut my life into two parts, — a joyous youth, and I know not what uncertain old age, during which I shall suffer at my ease."

"She has never loved," said Aquilina, in a deep voice. "She has never tramped a hundred miles with passionate delight to win a glance and a rejection; she never bound her life to a lock of hair, nor tried to stab

a hedge of men to save her sovereign, her lord, her God. Love, for her, was a jaunty colonel!"

"Ha, ha! La Rochelle," laughed Euphrasia, "love is like the wind; we know not whence it comes, nor whither it goeth. If you had ever been loved by a stupid beast, you would have a horror of men of wisdom."

"The Code forbids that," retorted Aquilina, ironically.

"I thought you had more compassion for soldiers," cried Euphrasia, laughing.

"Ah, well! are not they happy to be able to lay aside their intellects?" said Raphael.

"Happy!" said Aquilina, with a smile of pity and of terror, as she cast an awful look at the two friends, — "Happy! Ah, who knows what it is to be condemned to pleasure with death in one's heart."

Whosoever had looked with an observing eye upon the scene in this salon would have seen Milton's Pandemonium anticipated. The blue flames of the circulating punch gave an infernal color to the faces of those who were still able to drink. Frantic dances, prompted by brutal vigor, went on; excited laughter and shouts exploded like fireworks. Strewn, as it were, with dead and dying, the salon was like a battlefield. The atmosphere was hot with wine, with pleasures, and with speech. Intoxication, passion, delirium, forgetfulness of the world, were in all hearts, in all faces, written on the floors, sounding in the riot, and flung like a veil across every face in seething vapors. A shining dust, like the luminous track of a ray of sunshine, shimmered in the room, across which glanced eccentric forms and grotesque struggles; here and there groups of confused figures mingled and were confounded with the

marble masterpieces of sculpture which decorated the apartment.

Although the two friends still preserved a doubtful intelligence in their ideas and in their conduct, — a last quiver, as it were, of their own lives, — it was now impossible for them to distinguish what was real from what was visionary in the fantastic scene; nor what was possible and actual in the supernatural pictures which passed like a panorama before their wearied eyes. The atmosphere, sultry with visions and with the ardent sweetness which moves upon the surface of our dreams; above all, the inward impulse to an activity that was loaded with chains, — in short, the phenomena of sleep attacked them so powerfully that the scenes of this orgy seemed to them at last like the pantomime of a nightmare, where movement is noiseless and sound is lost to the ear.

At this crisis the confidential servant of the giver of the feast succeeded, not without difficulty, in attracting his master's attention and drawing him into the antechamber to whisper in his ear: "Monsieur, the people in the neighboring houses are at their windows, and complain of the uproar."

"If they are afraid of noise, can't they spread straw before their doors?" replied Taillefer.

Raphael suddenly burst into a roar of such tempestuous, incontinent laughter that Émile asked him the meaning of his brutal delight.

"You can hardly understand me," he replied. "In the first place I must confess that you stopped me on the quai Voltaire at the moment when I was about to drown myself. No doubt you will want to know the

motives for my suicide. But if I say that by an almost magic chance the poetic ruins of material worlds had just passed before my eyes, like a symbolic demonstration of human wisdom, and that now, at *this* moment, all the intellectual truths that we ransacked at table are brought to a point in these two women, — the living representatives of the follies of life, — and that our deep indifference to men and things has served as a means of transition between the highly wrought pictures of two systems of existence, diametrically opposed to each other, will you be a particle the wiser? If you were not drunk you might perhaps see in all that a treatise on philosophy."

"If your two feet were not resting on that delightful Aquilina, whose heavy breathing has a certain analogy to the mutterings of an approaching storm," replied Émile, who was himself twining his fingers in Euphrasia's hair, without really noticing his innocent occupation, "you would blush at your drunken chatter. Your two systems can be uttered in a single sentence, and reduced to a single thought. A simple and mechanical life leads to senseless wisdom by stifling our minds in toil; whereas a life passed in the vague immense of abstractions, or in the depths profound of the moral world leads to the follies of wisdom. In a word, kill emotions if you want to live to old age, or die young accepting the martyrdom of our passions, — that's our doom. And, I ask you, is such a doom out of keeping with the temperaments bestowed upon us by the rough jester to whom we owe the pattern of mankind?"

"Fool!" cried Raphael, interrupting him. "Go on abridging yourself at that rate, and you'll write vol-

umes. If I pretended to formulate those two ideas, I should tell you that man corrupts himself by the exercise of his reason, and purifies himself by ignorance. That 's the indictment of all societies. But whether we live with the wise or die with the fools, the result is, sooner or later, the same. Moreover, the grand abstracter of quintessences has already expressed those two systems by two words: CARYMARY, CARYMARA."

"You make me doubt the power of God, for you are more stupid than he is powerful," replied Émile. "Our beloved Rabelais has summed up that philosophy in fewer syllables than *Carymary, Carymara;* in the PERHAPS from which Montaigne took his *How do I know?* Besides, these modern words of moral science are nothing more than the exclamation of Pyrrho, the father of scepticism, halting between good and evil like the ass of Buridan between two measures of oats. But do let us drop these everlasting discussions which can only end nowadays in a yes or a no. What sensation did you want to experience by throwing yourself into the Seine? Were you jealous of that hydraulic machine on the pont Notre-Dame?"

"Ah! if you only knew my life."

"Why, my dear fellow," cried Émile, "I did not think you so commonplace; that remark is used up. Don't you know that everybody suffers more than anybody else?"

"Ah! —" cried Raphael.

"You are absolutely burlesque with your 'ah!' Come, tell me what disease of soul or body obliges you to drive home every morning, by some contraction of your muscles, the horses which ought by rights to

quarter you the night before like those of Damiens? Have you eaten your dog raw, without salt, in your garret? Have your children cried to you, 'Give us bread'? Have you sold your mistress's hair for a last napoleon at the gambling-table? Have you paid away a sham note on a false uncle and know it won't pass? Come, I am ready to listen. If you intended to fling yourself into the river for a woman, or a protested note, or because you were tired of life, I repudiate you. Confess yourself, and don't lie; I won't ask for strict historical facts. Above all, be as brief as your drunkenness will allow; remember, I'm as exacting as a novel-reader and as near asleep as a woman at vespers."

"Poor fool!" said Raphael. "Since when are sufferings not measured to our sensibility? When we reach a degree of science that will enable us to make a natural history of hearts, — to name them, and classify them in species, sub-species, families, crustacea, fossils, saurians, animalculæ, and heaven knows what, — then, my dear friend, it will be found that some are as tender and delicate as a flower broken by a touch of which the mineral heart is utterly unconscious."

"Oh! for heaven's sake, spare me the preface," cried Émile, with a look that was half-merry, half-pitiful, as he took his friend's hand.

PART II.

THE WOMAN WITHOUT A HEART.

After remaining silent for a moment Raphael said, with a half-careless gesture: —

"I don't really know whether the fumes of punch and wine have, or have not, something to do with a species of lucidity of mind which enables me at this moment to grasp the whole of my life as though it were a picture, where figures, colors, lights, shadows, and half-tints are faithfully rendered. This poetic play of my imagination would not surprise me if it were not accompanied by a feeling of contempt for my sufferings and for my former joys. Seen from a distance, my life seems as though shrunken by some moral phenomenon. This long, slow agony which has lasted ten years, can to-night be reproduced by a few sentences, in which suffering is no more than a thought, and pleasure a philosophical reflection. I now pass judgment; I feel nothing."

"You are as wearisome as an amendment in process of elucidation," cried Émile.

"Possibly," replied Raphael, without resentment. "And, therefore, to relieve your ears I spare you the first seventeen years of my life. Till then I lived, like you and a thousand others, the school and college life

whose fancied troubles and real joys are the delights of memory; a life whose Friday vegetables our pampered stomachs desire — so long as they cannot get them — that happy life whose toil may now seem contemptible, but which, nevertheless, trained us to labor — "

"Get to the story," said Émile, in a tone half-comic, half-plaintive.

"When I left college," resumed Raphael, "my father subjected me to severe discipline; he made me sleep in a room adjoining his study; I went to bed at nine, and got up at five. He meant me to study law conscientiously; and I did so, both at the law-school and in a lawyer's office. But the rules of time and distance were so rigidly applied to my walks and my studies, and at dinner my father inquired so closely into them — "

"What's all that to me?" said Émile.

"The devil take you!" replied Raphael. "How am I to make you understand my feelings unless I tell you the facts that imperceptibly influenced my soul, enslaved it to fear, and kept me a long time in the primitive simplicity of youth? Until I was twenty-one years old I succumbed to a despotism as cold as any monastic rule. To show you the dreariness of my life, I need only picture my father. He was a tall, slender man, with a hatchet face and a pale complexion; concise in speech, as fond of teasing as an old maid, and precise as an accountant. His paternity overshadowed, like a leaden dome, all my lively and joyous thoughts. If I tried to show him a soft and tender feeling he treated me like a child who had said a silly thing. I dreaded him far more than you and I ever feared a

school-master; and to him I was never more than eight years old. I think I see him now. In his maroon-colored overcoat, standing as straight as a paschal taper, he looked like a smoked herring wrapped in the reddish cover of an old pamphlet. And yet I loved him, for in the main he was just. Perhaps we never really hate severity if it accompanies a noble character and pure conduct, and is occasionally intermingled with kindness. If my father never left me alone, if, up to the age of twenty, he never allowed me to spend as I pleased ten francs, ten rascally, vagabond francs, — a treasure whose possession, vainly coveted, made me dream of ineffable delights, — at least he endeavored to procure me a few amusements. After promising me a pleasure for several months, he took me to the Bouffons, to a concert, and a ball, where I hoped to meet with a mistress. A mistress! to me she was independence. Shamefaced and timid, and ignorant of the jargon of society, where I knew no one, I came home with a heart still fresh, but swollen with desires. Then, on the morrow, bridled like a troop-horse by my father, I went back to my office and the law-school and the Palais. To try to escape the regular routine he had laid out for me would have been to excite his anger; he always threatened to ship me to the Antilles as a cabin-boy if I did wrong. I used to tremble horribly when occasionally I ventured off for an hour or two in quest of some amusement. Realize, if you can, a vagrant imagination, a tender heart, a poetic soul, ceaselessly in presence of the stoniest, coldest, most melancholy nature in the world; in short, marry a young girl to a skeleton, and you will have some idea

of an existence whose curious inward tumults can only be related, — ideas of flight checked by the mere aspect of my father, desperation calmed by sleep, desires repressed, gloom and melancholy charmed away by music. I exhaled my misery in melody. Beethoven and Mozart were often my faithful confidants.

"To-day I smile as I recollect the scruples which troubled my conscience at this period of my innocence and virtue. If I had set foot in a restaurant I should have thought myself ruined; my imagination made me regard a café as a place of debauchery, where men lost their honor and risked their fortunes; as to my risking money at play, I must first have had some. No matter whether I send you to sleep or not, I must tell you one of the terrible joys of my life, — one of those joys that sometimes come to us, armed with claws which are driven into our hearts like the red-hot iron into the shoulder of a galley-slave.

"I was at a ball at the Duc de Navarreins', a cousin of my father. To understand my position thoroughly you must know that my coat was shabby and my shoes ill-made; I wore a coarse cravat and gloves that had been worn already. I stood in a corner so that I could take the ices as they passed me, and watch the pretty women at my ease. My father noticed me. For some reason which I could never guess, he gave me his purse and his keys to keep for him. Close by me a number of men were playing cards. I heard the chink of gold. I was twenty years old, and I had often longed to pass a whole day plunged in the crimes of my age. It was a libertinism of the mind, an analogy to which cannot be found in the whims of a courtesan,

nor in the dreams of a young girl. For a year past I had fancied myself driving in a carriage with a beautiful woman beside me, assuming the great man, dining at Véry's, going to the theatre in the evening, determined not to return to my father till the next day, and then armed to meet him with an adventure as complicated as the Mariage de Figaro, the results of which he could not shake off. I had estimated all this happiness at a hundred and fifty francs. I was still, you see, under the innocent charm of playing truant. Hastily I turned into a boudoir, where, entirely alone, my fingers trembling and my eyes burning, I counted my father's money, — three hundred francs! All my imagined joys, evoked by that sum, danced before me like the witches of Macbeth around their caldron; but mine were alluring, quivering, delightful. I became at once a resolute scoundrel. Without listening to the buzzing in my ears, or to the violent beating of my heart, I took two napoleons, — I still see them before me! Their dates and edges were worn down, but Bonaparte's face was grinning on them. Replacing the purse in my pocket, I returned to the card-table, holding the two pieces of gold in the damp palm of my hand, and hovering round the players like a hawk over a poultry-yard. Filled with unspeakable emotions, I suddenly threw a keen-sighted glance around me. Certain that I was not observed by any one who knew me, I put my stake with that of a fat and jovial little man, on whose head I accumulated more prayers and vows than are made in a tempest at sea. Then with a rascally or a machiavelian instinct, which was surprising at my age, I posted myself near

a door and gazed through the salons, without, however, seeing anything. My soul and my eyes were upon that fatal green table behind me.

"From that evening I date a first physiological observation, to which I have since owed the species of penetration which has enabled me to grasp and comprehend certain mysteries of our dual nature. My back was turned to the table where my future happiness was at stake, — a happiness all the greater, perhaps, because it was criminal. Between the players and myself was a hedge of men, four or five deep; the murmur of voices drowned the chink of gold which mingled with the notes of the orchestra; yet in spite of all these obstacles, and by a gift granted to the passions by which they are enabled to annihilate time and space, I distinctly heard the words of the two players, I saw their hands, I knew which of them would turn up the king, just as plainly as if I had actually seen the cards; ten feet from the game I followed all its intricacies. My father passed me at that instant, and I understood the saying of the Scriptures, 'The Spirit of God passed before his face.' I won; I rushed to the table, slipping through the eddying crowd of men, like an eel through the broken meshes of a net. My fibres, which had been all pain, were now all happiness. I was like a convict on his way to execution, who meets the king. As it happened, a man wearing the Legion of honor claimed forty francs which he missed. I was suspected by the eyes about me, and I turned pale. The crime of having robbed my father seemed to me well punished. The fat little man interfered, and said, in a voice that seemed to me actually angelic, 'These

gentlemen all put down their stakes,' and paid the forty francs. I raised my head and threw a triumphant glance at the players. After replacing the gold I had taken from my father's purse, I left my gains with the worthy man, who went on winning. The moment I saw that I had one hundred and sixty francs, I wrapped them in my handkerchief so that they could neither roll nor rattle during our return home, and I played no more.

"'What were you doing in the card-room?' asked my father, as we were driving home. 'I was looking on,' I answered, trembling. 'Well,' returned my father, 'there would have been nothing out of the way if you had bet a little money yourself on the game. In the eyes of the world you are old enough to have the right to commit a few follies; you had my purse, and I should have excused you, Raphael, if you had taken something out of it.'

"I could not answer. When we got home I returned the keys and the purse to my father, who emptied the latter on the fireplace, counted the gold, and then turned to me with a rather kindly manner, saying in deliberate tones, with pauses more or less significant between each sentence: —

"'My son, you are now twenty years old. I am satisfied with you. You must have an allowance, if only to teach you economy and give you a knowledge of the things of life. You shall have in future one hundred francs a month. That sum you can dispose of as you please. Here is the first quarter for the coming year,' he added, fingering the pile of gold as if to be sure of the sum. I acknowledge that I came

near flinging myself at his feet, and declaring that I was a robber, a scoundrel, and — worse than all — a liar. Shame withheld me: I tried to kiss him, but he repulsed me feebly.

"'You are now a man, my child,' he said. 'What I do is a simple and proper thing, for which you need not thank me. If I have a right to your gratitude, Raphael,' he continued in a gentler tone, but full of dignity; 'it is because I have saved your youth from the evils which blast young men. In future we will be a pair of friends. You will take your degree in the course of a year. You have, not without some annoyance and certain privations, gained sterling friends, and a love of work which is necessary to men who are to take part in the government of their country. Learn, Raphael, to understand me. I do not wish to make a lawyer, nor yet a notary of you, but a statesman, who may one day become the glory of our unfortunate house. We will talk of these things to-morrow,' he added, dismissing me with a mysterious gesture.

"After that day my father frankly told me all his projects. I was an only child, and my mother had been dead ten years. My father, the head of a half-forgotten historical family in Auvergne, came to Paris. Gifted with the keen perceptions which, when accompanied by energy, make the men of the south of France so superior to others, he attained to a position at the very heart of power, without, however, possessing much outside influence. The Revolution destroyed his prospects; meantime he had married the heiress of a noble house, and was able under the Empire to restore the family to its former affluence. The Restoration, which enabled

my mother to recover some of her property, ruined my father. Having purchased estates given by the Emperor to his generals, which were situated in foreign countries, he struggled with lawyers and diplomatists and with Prussian and Bavarian courts of justice in the effort to retain possession of these contested gifts. My father now dragged me into the labyrinth of these important suits, on which our prosperity depended. We might be condemned to refund the accrued revenues, as well as the value of certain timber cut from 1814 to 1816; in which case my mother's property would barely suffice to save the honor of our name.

"And thus it happened that the day on which my father seemed to emancipate me, I fell under a still more cruel yoke. I was forced to fight as if on a battle-field, to work night and day, to hang around men in power and strive to interest them in our affairs, to guess at their opinions, their beliefs, to wheedle them, — them and their wives and their footmen and their dogs, — and to disguise the horrible business under elegant manners and agreeable nonsense. Ah! I learned to understand the trials which had blasted my father's face. For a whole year I lived apparently the life of a man of the world; but this seeming dissipation and my eagerness to become intimate with all who could be useful to us, only hid an enormous labor. My amusements were to draw up briefs, my conversations were about claims. Up to that time I had been virtuous from the impossibility of giving way to the passions of a young man; but now, fearing to cause my father's ruin and my own by the slightest negligence, I became my own despot and I allowed myself neither a pleasure

nor an expense. When we are young, when men and things have not yet roughly brushed from our souls the delicate bloom of sentiment, the freshness of thought, the purity of conscience, which will not let us come to terms with evil, we are keenly sensitive to duty; honor speaks to us with a loud voice, and we are forced to listen; we are honest and not two-sided, — and such was I at that time. I wished to justify my father's confidence. Once I had robbed him of a paltry sum; now, sharing the burden of his troubles, of his name, and his family honor, I would have given him all that I had and all my hopes, just as I did actually sacrifice to him my pleasures, finding happiness in the sacrifice.

"So, when at last Monsieur de Villèle exhumed, to defeat us, some imperial decree about forfeitures and limitations, and we saw ourselves ruined, I signed away my rights in our estates, keeping only a little island in the Loire, where my mother was buried. Perhaps sophistries, evasions, and political, philosophical, and philanthropic arguments might to-day persuade me not to do what our lawyers then called a 'folly.' But at one-and-twenty we are, I repeat, all generosity, warmth, and love. The tears of relief which I saw in my father's eyes were to me the noblest of fortunes, and the recollection of those tears has often since then consoled my misery.

"Ten months after paying his creditors my father died of a broken heart. He had loved me and he had ruined me; the thought killed him. Toward the close of the autumn of 1825, when twenty-two years old, I followed, all alone, the body of my earliest friend, my father, to its grave. Few young men have ever found

themselves more completely alone with their thoughts, behind a hearse, lost in the crowds of Paris, without a future and without means. The foundlings of public charity have at least a battle-field to look forward to, the Government or the *procureur du roi* for a father, the hospital for a refuge; but I — I had nothing.

"Three months later the public administrator paid me eleven hundred and twelve francs, the net proceeds of the settlement of my father's estate. Our creditors had forced me to sell all our furniture. Accustomed from my childhood to set great value on the objects of art and luxury with which I was surrounded, I could not help showing my surprise at this enforced relinquishment of everything. 'Oh,' said the administrator, 'what matter? those things are all so rococo.' Odious word, which destroyed the faiths of my childhood, and deprived me of my earliest illusions, — the dearest of all. My wealth was derived from the surplus of this sale, — my future now lay in a linen bag which held eleven hundred and twelve francs; society appeared before me as an administrator's clerk who kept his hat on his head. A valet, an old servant who was fond of me, and to whom my mother had left an annuity of four hundred francs, old Jonathas, said to me as I left the house from which in my childhood he had often taken me joyously to drive in a carriage, 'Be very economical, Monsieur Raphael.' Ah! poor man, he wept!

"Such, my dear Émile, were the events which controlled my destiny, trained my soul, and forced me, still young, into the falsest of all social positions," continued Raphael, after a pause. "Family ties might still have led me to visit a few houses, if my own

pride, and the contemptuous indifference of their masters had not closed the doors. Though related to persons of high station who were lavish of their influence for strangers, I was left without friends or protectors. Checked in all its aspirations, my soul fell back upon itself. By nature straightforward and frank, I now seemed cold and dissimulating. My father's rigor had destroyed my confidence in myself, I was timid and awkward; I could not believe that my presence had any power; I was displeasing in my own eyes, ugly even; I was ashamed of my own appearance. In spite of the inward voice which ought to sustain men of talent through every struggle, and which did cry out to me, 'Courage! onward!' in spite of sudden revelations of my power to my own spirit in solitude, in spite, too, of the hope which inspired me as I compared the best works of the day with those that hovered in my brain, I doubted myself as much as if I were a child. I was a victim to extreme ambition; I believed myself destined to do great things, yet I felt myself helpless. I needed friends, but I had none. I ought to have made myself a career in life, but I was forced to hang back in solitude, — less timid, perhaps, than ashamed.

"During the year when my father sent me into the vortex of Parisian society my heart was spotless and my spirit fresh. Like all grown-up children, I secretly longed for a great love. I met, among the young men of my age, a set of vain-glorious fellows who carried their noses in the air, talked nonsense, seated themselves without a tremor near to the most distinguished women, sucked the heads of their canes, attitudinized, and put, or pretended to put their heads on every

pillow, affecting to consider the virtuous and even the most prudish women as an easy conquest, to be captured by a word, a bold gesture, or the first insolent look. I declare to you on my soul and conscience that the possession of power or great literary renown seemed to me a triumph less difficult to attain than success with a woman of high rank, young, witty, and gracious. I found the troubles of my heart, my feelings, my beliefs, out of tune with the maxims of society. I was bold, but in soul only and not personally. I discovered too late that women do not like to be begged for; I have seen many that I adored at a distance, to whom I would have given a heart of proof, a soul to rend, an energy that feared neither sacrifices nor suffering; those women were won by fools whom I would not hire as servants. How many a time, silent and motionless, have I not admired the woman of my dreams, floating through a ball-room! Devoting my existence in thought to eternal caresses, I put my every hope into a glance; I offered her, in my ecstasy, the love of a man in whom there was no guile. At moments, I would have given my life for a single hour of mutual love. Well! I never found an ear in which to pour my passionate proposals, nor an eye on which my own might linger, nor a heart for my heart; and thus I lived, in all the torments of a powerless energy which consumed its own vitals, because I lacked either boldness, or opportunity, or experience. Perhaps I despaired of making myself understood, or feared to be understood too well.

"And yet each courteous look bestowed upon me raised a storm. In spite of my readiness to seize upon such looks or words and consider them as tender ad-

vances, I have never dared at the right time to speak, or refrain, with meaning looks, from speaking. My very feelings made my words insignificant, and my silence stupid. No doubt there was too much simplicity about me for an artificial society that lives by lamplight, and which utters its thought in conventional phrases or fashionable words. I knew nothing of the art of speaking by silence or of keeping silence by speech. And thus I lived on, — nursing within myself the fires that scorched me, gifted with a soul such as women desire to meet, a prey to emotions for which they are eager, possessing a vigor too often granted only to fools; and yet it is nevertheless true that women have been traitorously cruel to me. How often have I honestly admired the hero of some club as he boasted of his triumphs, never suspecting him of falsehood. I was wrong, no doubt, to expect a love that should be equal to mine; to seek in the heart of a frivolous and light-minded woman, hungry after luxury, drunken with vanity, that vast passion, that mighty ocean which beat tempestuously in my own breast. Oh! to feel one's self born to love, able to render a woman happy, and to have found none, not even a brave and noble Marceline nor some old marquise; to carry treasures about with us, and to meet not so much as a child nor an inquisitive young girl ready to admire them! — I often longed to kill myself in despair — "

"You are frightfully tragic to-night," cried Émile.

"Well, let me curse my own life," replied Raphael. "If your friendship is not strong enough to listen to my elegy, if you cannot make me the sacrifice of a half-hour's ennui, then sleep! But don't ask me again the

reason of my suicide which stands there, before me, and beckons me, and to which I yield. Before you judge a man you must know the secret of his thoughts, of his sorrows, of his feelings; not to be willing to know more of his life than its material events, is to make it a chronology, the history of fools."

The bitter tone in which these words were said struck Émile so sharply that from that moment he gave his whole attention to his friend's words, gazing at him in a half-besotted way.

"But," continued the narrator, "the light which time and events have now shed on these conditions give them another aspect. The order of things which I formerly considered a misfortune, did perhaps give birth to noble faculties in which later I took pride. The love of philosophic research, excessive study, delight in reading, which from the age of seven until I entered society were the constant occupation of my life, endowed me with a facile power by which, if you and my other friends are to be believed, I am able to give forth my ideas and to march in the van through the vast fields of human knowledge. The neglect to which I was accustomed, the habit of crushing down my feelings and living in the solitude of my own heart, invested me with powers of meditation and comparison. By not wasting my sensibilities in worldly excitements, which belittle the noblest soul and reduce it to the level of trifles, they became so concentrated as to be the perfected organ of a will more powerful than the impulses of passion. Misunderstood as I was by women, I nevertheless observed and judged them with the sagacity of rejected love. I can now see that the sincerity of my nature

made me displeasing to them. Perhaps women prefer a small amount of hypocrisy. I, who am by turns, in the course of an hour, man and child, thinker and trifler, without prejudices and full of superstitions, sometimes a woman like themselves, — may they not have mistaken my natural simplicity for cynicism, and the purity of my thoughts for licentiousness? Science was weariness of mind to them; poetic languor weakness. An extreme mobility of imagination, the misfortune of poets, made me seem perhaps incapable of love, without constancy of ideas, without vigor. Apparently an idiot when I held my tongue, I seemed to alarm them when I tried to please; and so all women condemned me. I accepted with tears of grief the judgment of the world, but the punishment bore fruit. I longed to avenge myself on society. I desired to possess the soul of all women by bringing to my feet all minds, and seeing all eyes fixed upon me when a footman, opening the doors of salons, should announce my name. Many a time, from childhood up, had I struck my forehead, saying to myself, like André Chénier, 'There is something here!' I believed that I felt within me a thought to utter, a system to establish, a science to explain.

"Oh, Émile! to-day I am barely twenty-six years old; I am doomed to die unknown without possessing the woman whose lover I dreamed of being, — let me therefore tell you of my follies. Have we not all, more or less, taken our desires for realities? Ah, I want no man for a friend who has never crowned himself in his dreams, never built himself a pedestal, nor believed in a visionary mistress. I, myself, have been general,

emperor, Byron, even, — then nothing. After flitting, as it were, along the ridge-pole of human things, I perceived there were mountains above me, and difficulties to conquer. The egregious self-conceit which boiled within me, my sublime belief in a destiny, — which becomes genius, perhaps, if a man does not let his soul be caught and torn by contact with worldly interests, just as a sheep leaves its fleece on the thorns of a thicket, — these things saved me. I resolved to cover myself with glory, and to work in silence for the woman I hoped to win. All women were summed up for me in that one woman, and I fancied I should behold her in the first I met; then, finding a queen in all of them, I expected them, like queens who are forced to make advances to their lovers, to come to me, — to me, suffering, and poor, and timid, as I was. Ah! for her who would thus have pitied me, what wealth of gratitude, not to speak of love, was in my heart; I could have adored her all her life. Later, my observation told me cruel truths.

"And so, dear Émile, I came near living eternally alone. Women are wont, I hardly know through what tendency of mind, to see chiefly the defects of a man of talent and the merit of fools; they feel a sympathy with the good qualities of the foolish man, for those qualities perpetually flatter and conceal their own defects; while a superior man offers them scarcely enough enjoyment to make up for his actual imperfections. Talent is certainly an intermittent fever; and no woman wants to share its discomforts only; they all seek in their lovers something that satisfies their own vanity. They love themselves in us. A poor man, proud, artistic, endowed with the power of creation, is

also gifted with too aggressive an egotism. His existence is a maelstrom of ideas and thoughts which involves all about him, and his mistress must follow in the whirl. How can a petted woman believe in the love of such a man? Would she ever seek him? Such a lover has no leisure for the pretty parodies of sentiment, the triumph of false and callous souls, to which women attach so much importance. Time is all too short for his labors, — how can he waste it in bedizening and belittling himself for a ball-room? I could give my life at a word, but I could not abase it to frivolity. There is something in the behavior of a man who dances attendance on a pale and lackadaisical woman which is repugnant to the true artist. The shows of love are not enough for a man who is poor and yet great; he wants its devotion. The pretty creatures who pass their lives as lay figures for the fashions, or in trying on a shawl, have no devotion; they exact it; they see nothing in love but the pleasure of commanding, — never that of obeying. The true wife in heart and in flesh and bones will let herself be drawn hither and thither where he goes who is her life, her strength, her glory, her happiness. Superior men need women of oriental natures, whose sole thought is the study of their needs; to them, a discord between their desires and the means of satisfying them is suffering.

"But I, who thought myself a man of genius, I was attracted by the women of fashion and frivolity. Brought up to ideas the reverse of those commonly accepted, thinking that I could mount the skies without a ladder, possessing treasures within me that had no vent, bristling with knowledge which overloaded my

memory, and was never fitly classified and therefore never assimilated; without relations, without friends, alone in the midst of a hideous desert, a paved desert, a living, thinking, moving desert, where all was worse than inimical, was indifferent to me, — the resolution that I then took was natural, though wild. It brought with it something, I can hardly tell you what, that seemed impossible, and that consequently made a demand upon my courage. It was as though I played a game with myself in which I was both the player and the stake. This was my plan: My eleven hundred and twelve francs were to suffice for my livelihood for three years, and I gave myself that time to bring out a work which should attract public attention and give me either fame or money. I rejoiced in the thought that I should live on bread and milk like an Egyptian hermit, plunged in the world of ideas and books, a sphere inaccessible in the midst of this tumultuous Paris, a sphere of labor and of silence, where, like a chrysalis, I might build myself a tomb from which to rise, new-born, in fame and brilliancy. I was about to risk death that I might live. By reducing existence to its actual needs, I found that three hundred and sixty-five francs a year would suffice to sustain life. That meagre sum did actually support me so long as I subjected myself to cloistral discipline — "

"Impossible!" cried Émile.

"I lived three years in that way," replied Raphael, with a sort of pride. "Count it up. Three sous for bread, two sous for milk, three sous for pork, kept me from dying of hunger, and brought my mind to a condition of singular lucidity. I have studied, as you know, the remarkable effects produced by diet on the

imagination. My lodging cost me three sous a day, I burned three sous' worth of oil a night, I took care of my own room, I wore flannel shirts to save two sous a day in washing. I kept myself warm with coal, whose cost divided among the days of the year was only two sous for each day. I had clothes and linen and foot-gear enough for three years, but I dressed only when I went to certain public lectures, and to the libraries. These expenses amounted to eighteen sous a day, and I still had two sous daily for unexpected wants. I remember that I never during those three years crossed the pont des Arts, nor did I ever buy any water; I fetched all I wanted from the fountain in the place Saint-Michel, at the corner of the rue des Grès. Oh! I bore my poverty proudly. A man who foresees a splendid future goes through a period of penury like an innocent man on his way to the scaffold; he feels no shame. I would not allow myself to dread illness. Like Aquilina, I faced the hospital without fear. But I never for a moment doubted my good health. Besides, it is only the hopeless who lie down to die. I cut my own hair, until the moment when an angel of love or of goodness —

"But I will not anticipate. What I want you to know, dear friend, is that, in default of a mistress, I lived with a great thought, with a dream, with a lie which we all begin by believing, more or less. To-day I laugh at myself, — *that* myself, possibly saintly and sublime, which no longer exists. Society, the world, our manners and customs and morals seen near by, have shown me the dangers of my innocent belief, and the needless waste of my fervent labors. Such equip-

ments are worse than useless to the ambitious; light should be the baggage of him who pursues fortune. It is a fault of superior men that they spend their youthful years in making themselves worthy of favor. While the poor man heaps up treasures of his own strength and of science, to bear the strain of a power that escapes him, mere schemers, rich in words, and wanting in ideas, go and come, electrify fools, and win the confidence of ninnies; the one studies, the others move about; the one is modest, the others bold; the man of genius subdues his pride, the schemer flaunts his and inevitably succeeds. Men in power are so anxious to find merit ready-made, and a brazen show of intellect, that it is childish in a true man of science to hope for human rewards. I certainly am not trying to paraphrase the common doctrines about virtue, — that Song of Songs forever sung by neglected genius. I simply seek to draw a just conclusion from the frequent successes obtained by mediocre men. Alas! study is so motherly and kind that it seems almost a crime to ask her for other than the pure and gentle joys with which she nourishes her children.

"I remember how often I gayly dipped my bread into my milk, sitting near my window to breathe the air, and letting my eyes wander over a landscape of brown, gray, and red roofs, some of slate, some of tiles, covered with mosses gray or green. If at first this outlook seemed to me monotonous, I soon discovered singular beauties in it. Sometimes, after dark, bright gleams of light, escaping from a half-closed blind, shaded and animated the dark depths of this original landscape, or the pale gleam of the street-lamps sent

up yellow reflections through the fog, faintly connecting the streets with these undulating crowded roofs, like an ocean of stationary waves. Sometimes strange figures made their appearance in the middle of this dull desert; among the flowers of a hanging garden I could see the sharp, hooked profile of an old woman, watering her nasturtiums; or, framed by a weather-beaten dormer-window, a young girl stood dressing and thinking herself alone, while I could just perceive a handsome forehead, and the long coils of hair held up by a pretty arm. Here and there in the gutters were a few stray plants, poor weeds soon scattered by the wind. I studied the mosses when their colors brightened, after a rain, from the dry brown velvet with varying reflections into which the sun had dried them. The fugitive and poetic effects of the daylight, the gloom of the mists, the sudden sparkling of the sun, the silence and magic of the night, the mysteries of the dawn, the smoke of the various chimneys, each and all of the changes of this weird landscape were familiar and interesting to me. I loved my imprisonment; it was voluntary. These prairies of undulating roofs which covered inhabited abysses, suited my soul and harmonized with my thoughts. It is wearisome to encounter the world of social life when we descend from the celestial heights whither scientific meditations have led us; and for this reason I have always thoroughly understood the bareness of monasteries.

"When I had fully resolved to follow my new plan of life, I looked for a lodging in the most deserted parts of Paris. One evening, returning from the Estrapade, I walked through the rue des Cordiers on my way home.

At the angle of the rue de Cluny I saw a little girl about fourteen years of age, who was playing at battledore with a number of companions, while their fun and laughter amused the neighbors. The weather was fine, the evening warm, and it was the latter part of November. Women were gossiping from door to door, as though they were in some provincial town on a fête-day. I took notice of the young girl, whose face was charmingly expressive, and her figure a study for a painter. The whole scene was delightful. I looked about to discover the reason of this simple-hearted good-humor in the middle of Paris; seeing that the street was not a thoroughfare, I concluded that few persons entered it. Recollecting that Jean-Jacques Rousseau once lived there, I sought and found the Hôtel Saint-Quentin whose dilapidated appearance encouraged me to hope for cheap quarters, and I entered it. In the first low-ceilinged room were the time-honored brass candlesticks, filled with common tallow candles, methodically placed above a row of keys. I was struck with the cleanliness of this room, usually ill-kept in other such inns, but which here reminded me of a *genre* picture. The blue bed, the utensils, the furniture, all had a certain air of social coquetry. The mistress of the house, a woman of forty, whose face betrayed sorrows and whose eyes seemed dulled by tears, came up to me; I humbly told her the sum I was able to pay, and without showing surprise she took a key from the line of hooks and preceded me to the garret, where she showed me a room that looked out over the roofs and down into the courts of the neighboring houses, across which clothes-lines loaded with linen were stretched

from window to window. Nothing could be more odious than this room; its dirty yellow walls, redolent of poverty, seemed to call aloud for its penniless student. The roof sloped on one side, and the disjointed tiles left chinks through which the daylight made its way. There was room for a bed, a table, a few chairs, and I could manage to squeeze my piano into a sharp angle of the roof. This cell, worthy of the Leads of Venice, was unfurnished, for the mistress of the house was too poor to fit it up, and had therefore never let it; but having retained a few articles for my own personal use from the sale of my furniture, I soon came to terms with my hostess, and took possession of my quarters on the following day.

"I lived nearly three years in this sky sepulchre, working night and day without relaxation, but with such delight that study seemed to me the noblest occupation, the happiest solution of human life. In the calm, the silence necessary to a student there is something not to be described, as sweet and intoxicating as love. The exercise of thought, the searching out of ideas, the tranquil meditations of science, bring ineffable, indescribable delights, — like all else that appertains to intellect, whose phenomena are invisible to our exterior senses. And yet we are forced to express the mysteries of the spirit under some form of material comparison. The delight of swimming in a pure lake, alone, among rocks and woods and flowery shores, caressed by a warm breeze, may give to some a faint conception of the happiness I felt as my soul bathed in the floods of a mysterious light, as I listened to the awful and confused voices of inspiration, and as, from some

unknown source, the waters rippled in my palpitating brain. To see an idea dawn upon the field of human apprehension, rising like the sun at daybreak, or better still, growing like a child, attaining puberty, slowly making itself virile, — ah! that is a higher joy than all other terrestrial joys; it is, in fact, a divine pleasure. Study invests all things about us with a sort of magic. The rickety table at which I wrote, with its brown sheepskin cover, my piano, my bed, my armchair, the fantastic lines of the wall-paper, my furniture, — all these things had life for me; they were my humble friends, the silent sharers of my destiny. Many a time have I breathed out to them my soul. Often, as my eyes rested on a defaced moulding, has my mind caught some new argument, some striking proof of the theory I was establishing, or certain words which happily developed (or so it seemed to me) thoughts that could scarcely be interpreted. By dint of gazing at the objects which surrounded me, each came to have its individual countenance and character, each spoke to me; if the sun, setting below the roofs, threw a furtive ray across my narrow window they grew rosy, or paled, or shone, or grieved, or made merry, with ever new effects and surprises. The trifling incidents of a life of solitude, which pass unnoticed among the busy occupations of society, are the consolation of prisoners. Was I not the captive of an idea, imprisoned in a theory, yet supported and sustained by the beckoning nod of fame? At each conquered difficulty I kissed the soft hands of the rich and elegant woman with the beautiful eyes who, methought, would some day caress my hair and whisper tenderly, 'How you have suffered!'

"I had undertaken two great works. A comedy which might bring me swift renown, money, and entrance into the world, where I wished to reappear with the regal rights of genius. You all saw in that first masterpiece the initial blunder of a young man just out of college, a silly effort of youth. Those jokes cut the wings of my soaring illusions, and they have never flown since. You, alone, dear Émile, soothed the wound which others then made in my heart. You alone have appreciated my 'Theory of the Will,' — that long work for which I studied oriental languages, anatomy, and physiology, and to which I devoted nearly all my time. That work, if I am not mistaken, will complete the labors of Mesmer, Lavater, Gall, and Bichat, by opening a new road to human science.

"At this point, my grand, my noble life stopped short; here ended those consecrated days, that silk-worm's toil unknown to the world, whose sole recompense is perhaps in the toil itself. From the day I first exercised my reason to that on which I ended my 'Theory' I observed, learned, wrote, and read without intermission; my life was one long task. Loving oriental indolence, cherishing revery, pleasure-loving by nature, I nevertheless denied myself every Parisian enjoyment. Gourmand by inclination, I was ascetic in practice; liking travel either by land or sea, wishing to visit foreign countries, finding amusement, like a child, in skipping stones upon the water, I remained seated in my chair, pen in hand; ready and desirous of speech, I listened silently to the professors in the lecture-room of the Bibliothèque and the Museum; I slept upon my solitary pallet like a Benedictine, and yet woman was my

dream, my vision, — a vision that I strove to caress as it eluded me. My life was indeed a cruel antithesis, a perpetual untruth.

"And then, — see what men are! — sometimes my natural desires revived like a flame long smothered. By a mirage, as it were, or possessed by that delirium of green fields, I, deprived of all the mistresses that I coveted, poor and lonely in my artist's garret, I fancied myself surrounded with delightful women. I drove through the streets of Paris on the soft cushions of a brilliant equipage! I was eaten up by vice, plunged in excesses, wishing all and obtaining all; drunk on fasting, like Saint Anthony when tempted. Sleep happily extinguished such maddening visions, and on the morrow science recalled me with a smile, and to her I was ever faithful. I imagine that women, thought virtuous, must often be a prey to these wild tempests of passions and desires which rise up in us despite ourselves. Such dreams are not without charm; they are like those evening talks by the fireside in which we wander to distant lands. But what becomes of virtue during such excursions, where thought oversprings all barriers?

"During the first ten months of my seclusion I led the solitary and poverty-stricken life I have now depicted. Every morning I went out early and unseen, to buy my provisions for the day; I cleaned and arranged my room; I was servant and master both, and proudly I Diogenized. By the end of that time, during which my landlady and her daughter watched my behavior and principles, examined into my personal life and understood my poverty (perhaps because they themselves were unfortunate), there had come to be strong ties between

us. Pauline, the charming child whose artless grace and innocence had first led me to the house, did me many services which it was impossible to refuse. All unfortunate beings are sisters; they speak the same language, feel the same generosity, — the generosity of those who, having nothing, are prodigal of feeling and give themselves and their time. Little by little, Pauline took control of my room and waited on me; to which her mother made no objection. I saw the mother herself mending my linen and blushing when discovered in that charitable occupation. Becoming thus in spite of myself their protégé, I accepted their kindness. To understand this relation we must know the transports of mental toil, the tyranny of ideas, the instinctive repugnance for the petty details of material life, which possess a man of genius. How could I resist the delicate attention with which Pauline, stepping softly, placed my frugal food beside me, when she noticed that I had eaten nothing for seven or eight hours? With the grace of a woman and the artlessness of a child, she would smile with a finger on her lips, as if to tell me that I must not notice her. She was Ariel gliding like a sylph beneath my roof and foreseeing my needs.

"One evening Pauline with simple sincerity told me their history. Her father had commanded a squadron of the grenadiers of the Imperial Guard. He was taken prisoner by Cossacks at the passage of the Beresina. Later, when Napoleon proposed to exchange him, the Russian authorities searched Siberia in vain; it was said by other prisoners that he had escaped to India. From that time Madame Gaudin, my landlady, had heard nothing of her husband. The disasters of 1814

and 1815 occurred; alone, without resources, she determined to keep a lodging-house for the support of herself and daughter. The hope of recovering her husband never left her. Her cruellest suffering came from the necessity of leaving Pauline without education, — her Pauline, the goddaughter of the Princesse Borghese, now deprived of all the advantages promised by her imperial protectress. When Madame Gaudin confided to me this bitter grief, which was literally killing her, she said in heartrending tones: —

"'I would gladly give Gaudin's rank as Baron of the Empire and our rights in the endowment of Witzchnau, if Pauline could be educated at Saint-Denis.'

"As she spoke a thought made me quiver; to repay the care these two good women bestowed upon me I offered to teach Pauline. The simplicity with which they received the proposal was equal to that which dictated it. I thus gained hours of recreation. The little girl had charming qualities; she learned with ease, and she soon excelled me on the piano. Being encouraged to think aloud when she was with me, she displayed a thousand little prettinesses of a heart that opened to life like the petals of a flower gently unclosing to the sun. She listened to what I said composedly and with pleasure; fixing upon me her soft, velvety, black eyes, which seemed to smile, she repeated her lessons in a sweet, caressing voice, and showed a childish joy when I was satisfied with her. Her mother, growing daily more and more anxious to preserve her from all danger, and to let the graces of her nature grow and develop, was pleased to see her given up to study. My piano was the only one she could use, and she took advantage

of my absences to practise upon it. When I returned I always found her in my room, in the humblest of dresses, and yet at every movement of her supple body the charms of her figure could be seen beneath the coarse material. Like the heroine of 'The Ass's Skin,' she had a tiny foot in a rough shoe. But all these pretty treasures, this wealth of girlish charm, this luxury of beauty was lost upon me. I bade myself regard her as a sister, and I should have shrunk with horror from betraying her mother's confidence. I admired the charming child like a picture, like the portrait of some lost mistress. She was my child, my statue; I was another Pygmalion, seeking to make a living, blooming, thinking, speaking virgin into marble. I was very severe with her, but the more I made her feel my authority, the gentler and more submissive she grew. A sense of honor strengthened and maintained my reserve and self-control. To betray a woman and to become bankrupt have always seemed to me one and the same thing. To love a young girl, or let one's self be loved by her, constitutes a contract whose conditions should be clearly understood. We may abandon the women who sell themselves, but never the young girl who gives her love, for she is ignorant of the extent of her sacrifice. I might have married Pauline, but it would have been madness. I should have delivered over that gentle virgin soul to unutterable misery. My poverty spoke with its own egotistical language, and placed its iron hand forever between her soul and mine.

"I confess to my shame that I have no conception of love in poverty. It may be a moral vitiation in me, due to the human malady called civilization, but a woman,

be she as beautiful as Helen of Troy or Homer's Galatea, has no power over my senses if she is squalid. Hail to the love in silks and satins, surrounded by those marvels of luxury that adorn it so well, for it is itself, perhaps, a luxury. I like to crumple in fancy the crisp, fresh dresses, to crush the flowers, and bury a devastating hand among the elegantly arranged tresses of a perfumed head. Glowing eyes, hiding behind a veil of lace, yet piercing it as flame tears through the smoke of a cannon, offer me mysterious delights. My love longs for silken ladders to scale in silence on winter nights. What happiness to enter, covered with snow, a lighted and perfumed chamber, tapestried with painted silks, and to find there a woman covered like ourselves with snow, — for how else shall we call those alluring veils of muslin, through which she is vaguely seen like an angel coming through a cloud? But my desires are various; I ask for timid happiness, and for bold security; moreover, I wish to meet my mysterious ideal in the world, dazzling, yet virtuous, the centre of homage, robed in laces, adorned with diamonds, giving laws to social life; so high in rank, and so imposing, that none shall dare to seek her love. From the midst of such courtly reverence she should fling me a side-glance, a glance that made these adventitious charms of no account, a glance in which she sacrificed the world and other men to me. How often have I not felt myself a fool to love a few yards of blonde, or velvet, or fine linen, the art of a hairdresser, carriages, titles, heraldic blazons painted on glass or manufactured by a jeweller, — in short, all that is most artificial and least womanly in woman. I ridiculed myself, I reasoned

with myself, but all in vain. The refined smile of a high-bred woman, the distinction of her manners, her respect for her own person, enchant me; the very barrier that she thus puts between herself and the world flatters every vanity within me, and is the half of love. Envied for the possession of such a woman, my felicity would have a higher flavor. By doing nothing that other women do, neither moving nor living as they do, wrapped in a mantle that they can never wear, shedding a perfume of her own about her, my mistress would seem to me more mine; the farther she were removed from earth, even in all that makes love earthly, the more beautiful she would be to my eyes. Happily, France has been without a queen for twenty years, or I should have loved the queen. But to have the ways of a princess, a woman must needs be rich.

"In presence of such romantic fancies what was Pauline? Could she give me the love that kills, that forces into play all human faculties, that costs us life itself? Who dies for the girls who give themselves, poor things? I have never been able to overcome such feelings as these, nor the poetic reveries they excite. I was born for an impossible love, and fate has willed that I should meet with something far beyond my wishes. Many a time I have fancied Pauline's little feet encased in satin slippers, her round waist, slender as a young poplar-tree, imprisoned in a gauzy robe, a lace scarf thrown about her neck and bosom, as I led her down the carpeted stairs of a mansion to the carriage at the door. I should have adored her thus. I gave her, in fancy, a pride she never had; I robbed her of her virtues, her artless grace, her candid smile,

the simplicity of her nature; I plunged her into the Styx of our social vices; I hardened her heart that she might bear the burden of our sins, and become the silly puppet of our salons, the languid creature who lies in bed all day, and revives by night at the dawn of a blaze of lamps. Pauline was all freshness, all feeling, but I could only care for her if cold and hard.

"In the latter days of my madness I looked back to Pauline as we do to some memory of our childhood. More than once the recollection has deeply moved me; I recalled delightful moments; once more I saw her seated by my table with her sewing, — silent, tranquil, composed, with faint lights from my garret window falling in silvery reflections upon her ebon hair; I heard her girlish laughter, her voice, with its rich inflections warbling the pretty ballads she composed with ease. Often my Pauline grew transfigured as she sang or played, and at such times her face bore a striking resemblance to the noble head by which Carlo Dolci has represented Italy. My bitter memory flings that innocent girl like a remorse across the excesses of my life; she stands before me the image of womanhood and virtue. But let us leave her to her destiny. However wretched that may be, I have at least sheltered her from the awful storms of my existence, and refrained from dragging her to the depths of my own hell.

"Until last winter my life was the calm and studious life I have tried to picture to you. Early in December, 1829, I met Eugène de Rastignac, who in spite of my shabby clothes put his arm in mine, and inquired into my condition with brotherly interest. Won by those charming manners of his, I told him, briefly, about my

life and my hopes; he laughed, and declared I was a man of genius and a fool. His Gascon voice, his knowledge of the world, his opulent style of living, which he owes to his wits, have an irresistible power over me. He declared I should die in a hospital, ignored as an imbecile, pictured my funeral, and buried me in a pauper's grave. Then he began to expound charlatanism; with the good-natured warmth that makes him so attractive, he insisted that all men of genius are humbugs. He declared I had one sense lacking, and risked death if I persisted in staying alone in the rue des Cordiers; he urged me to return to society, and make my name familiar in people's mouths, and get rid of the humble *monsieur*, which was very unbecoming to a great man during his lifetime.

"'Idiots call that kind of life time-serving,' he cried; 'moral folks proscribe it as *dissipated*. Never mind about men and their opinions, look at results. Here you are, toiling incessantly, yet you 'll never accomplish anything. Now I am capable of everything and good at nothing, lazy as a lobster, but I succeed. I spread myself about, I push, and society makes room for me; I brag, and it believes me; I make debts, and other people pay them. Dissipation, my dear fellow, is a political system. The life of a man who is employed in squandering his means is unmistakably a speculation; he invests his capital in friends, in pleasures, in acquiring connections and influence. A merchant risks a million; for twenty years he neither sleeps nor drinks nor amuses himself. He broods over his million, he trots it from place to place all over Europe; he is worried to death; all the devils are after it; then comes failure, liquidation (I've

seen it many a time), and there he is, without a penny, without a name, without a friend. The spendthrift, on the other hand, does amuse himself; he knows how to race his horse. If, by chance, he loses his capital, he can get himself appointed receiver-general, secretary to a ministry, ambassador, — or he marries. He is sure to have friends, reputation, and plenty of money. Knowing the secret springs of society, he works them to his profit. Is that system logical, or am I a fool? Is n't that the moral of the comedy that is played every day in the world? Your work is just finished, you say,' resumed Rastignac after a pause; 'you 've got immense talent. Well, what of it? you are now just at the point where I started. Make your success personally for yourself, it is the surest way. Set up friendships and intimacies at the clubs and with cliques; please those who can trumpet you along. I wish to do my share toward your success; I'll be the jeweller to set the diamonds in your crown. And for a beginning,' he added, 'come to my rooms to-morrow night. I will take you to a house where you will find all Paris, our Paris, the Paris of beauties, celebrities, and millionnaires, men who talk gold like Chrysostom. When such people adopt a book that book becomes the fashion; if it is really good they have given the brevet of genius without knowing it. If you have any mother-wit in you, my dear fellow, you can yourself make the fortune of your theory by thoroughly understanding the theory of fortune. To-morrow night you shall see the beautiful Comtesse Fedora, the reigning fashion.'

"'I never heard of her.'

"'You 're a Caffre,' said Rastignac, laughing. 'Not

know Fedora! — a marriageable woman, who has an income of eighty thousand francs, but won't take any man, or at least whom no man takes; a species of female problem; a Parisian who is half-Russian, a Russian half-Parisian; a woman who is a living edition of romantic productions that never get published; the most beautiful woman in Paris, and the most courteous. You are not even a Caffre, you are the missing link between a Caffre and the animal creation. Adieu until to-morrow.'

"He turned on his heel and disappeared without waiting for an answer, seeming not to admit that a reasonable man could refuse an introduction to Fedora. How can we explain the fascination of a name? FEDORA pursued me like an evil thought with which we strive to compromise. A voice within me said, 'Thou wilt go to Fedora.' In vain I combated that voice and told it that it lied; it crushed my arguments with that name, Fedora. That name, that woman, were they the symbol of my desires, the key-note of my life? The name rang with the artificial poetry of society, with the fêtes of the great world of Paris and the glitter of all vanities. The woman appeared to me as in a vision, embodying those problems of passion over which I brooded. Perhaps it was neither the woman nor the name, but my vices which sprang erect in my mind to tempt me anew. The Comtesse Fedora, rich and without a lover, resisting Parisian seductions, was she not the incarnation of my hopes and visions? I had created a woman; my thought had formed her; I had dreamed her, — and she was here.

"During the night I could not sleep; I became her

lover. A few hours were a lifetime, — a lifetime of love; I tasted all its fruitful and passionate delights. On the morrow, unable to bear the suspense of waiting till evening, I went out and hired a novel and spent the day in reading it, thus endeavoring not to think and not to measure the slow passage of time. While I read, that name, Fedora, echoed within me like a sound heard in the far distance which does not disturb us but is, nevertheless, in our ears. Fortunately I owned a black coat and a white waistcoat in good condition. Of all my little store there still remained some thirty francs which I had dispersed about in my various drawers and among my clothes, so as to put between each five-franc piece and some stray fancy the thorny barrier of search and the trouble of circumnavigating my room. While I was dressing I pursued this scattered wealth through an ocean of paper. My gloves and a cab devoured a month's living. Alas! we are never without money for our whims; we discuss no costs but those of necessary or useful things. We carelessly fling away our gold on a ballet-girl, and haggle over a bill with a laborer whose family is starving. How many men wearing a hundred-franc coat, and a diamond in the knob of their cane, dine for twenty-five sous! Ah! we seldom think the pleasures of vanity too dear.

"Rastignac, faithful to our appointment, smiled at my metamorphose and made fun of it; however, he gave me, as we went along, some charitable advice as to the manner in which I had best behave with the countess. He told me she was avaricious, vain, and distrustful; but good-humoredly distrustful, vain with simplicity, and miserly with ostentation.

"'You know how I am situated,' he said, 'and how much I should lose by changing loves. My observation of Fedora is disinterested and cool; therefore my judgment is worth something. I present you to her with a view of making your fortune; take care what you say to her, for she has a cruel memory, and is clever enough to drive a diplomatist crazy; she can guess the very instant when he begins to tell the truth. Between ourselves, I doubt if her marriage was ever recognized by the emperor, for the Russian ambassador laughed when I asked him about her. He does not receive her at the embassy, and bows very coldly when they meet in the Bois. Nevertheless, she belongs in Madame de Sérizy's set, and visits Madame de Nucingen and Madame de Restaud. In France, at any rate, her reputation is intact. The Duchesse de Carigliano, the most *high-necked* of all that Bonapartist clique, often spends a few days with her at her country-house. Several young dandies and the son of a peer offer their names in exchange for her money; but she politely refuses them. Perhaps her love can go no lower than a count. You are a marquis; therefore push on if she pleases you. Now that 's what I call giving advice.'

"The tone in which all this was said made me fancy that Rastignac was trying to pique my curiosity, so that my impromptu passion had reached a crisis by the time we entered a hall decorated with flowers. As we went up the wide, carpeted stairs, where I noticed many signs of English comfort, my heart beat violently. I blushed at myself; I belied my birth, my feelings, my pride; I was idiotically bourgeois in my sensations. Alas, I came from a garret where I had spent three

poverty-stricken years without really learning to put the treasures of intellectual life above the baubles of an artificial existence.

"As I entered I saw a woman about twenty-two years of age, of medium height, dressed in white, surrounded by a circle of men, extended rather than seated in a reclining chair, and holding in her hand a feather screen. When she observed Rastignac, she rose and came toward us with a gracious smile, and paid me a conventional compliment in a melodious voice. Eugène gave her the idea that I was a man of talent, and his hearty Gascon emphasis procured me a cordial reception. I was made the object of attentions which confused me, but Rastignac happily covered my embarrassment by an allusion to my modesty. There I met scholars, men of letters, former ministers, and peers of France. The conversation resumed the course our entrance had interrupted, and by degrees, feeling that I had a reputation to sustain, I grew more confident; then, without presuming on the right of speech which was granted to me, I tried to sum up the various points of the discussion with remarks that were more or less thoughtful, incisive, or witty. I made some sensation. For the thousandth time in his life Rastignac was prophetic. When the rooms were sufficiently well filled so that we could freely move about, he gave me his arm, and we walked through the apartments.

"'Don't seem too enchanted with the princess,' he said, 'or she will guess the motive of your visit.'

"The salons were furnished with exquisite taste. I noticed rare pictures. Each room had a character of its own, after the fashion of opulent English mansions;

the silken hangings, the ornaments, the shapes of the furniture, in fact the slightest decoration harmonized with a leading thought. In a Gothic boudoir the doors were concealed behind tapestried curtains; the bordering of the stuffs, the clock, the pattern of the carpet, were all Gothic; the ceiling, formed of cross-beams carved out of dark wood, showed a number of compartments painted with grace and originality; the panelling of the wainscots was artistic; nothing injured the general effect of this charming decoration, which was even increased by the costly colored glass of the windows. I was next astonished at the sight of a little modern salon, where some artist had exhausted our national decorative science, — at once so delicate, so fresh, so elegant, without brilliancy, and sober in gilding. It was vague and amorous like a German ballad, a true retreat for a passion of 1827, perfumed with baskets of the choicest plants. Beyond this room was a gilded salon of the time of Louis XIV., which produced, by its contrast with our modern taste, a curious but agreeable effect.

"'You will be well lodged,' said Rastignac, with a smile, in which there was a tinge of irony. 'Is n't this fascinating?' he added, sitting down. Suddenly he rose, took me by the arm, and drew me into a bedroom, where, beneath a canopy of muslin and white moire, was a bed faintly lighted by a hanging lamp, — the bed of a fairy wedded to a genie.

"'Don't you think there is a positive indecency, insolence, and coquetry,' he exclaimed in a low voice, 'in exhibiting this throne of love! To love no one, and then allow everybody to leave his card here! If I

were free, I would like to bring that woman weeping and submissive to her knees!'

"'Are you sure of her virtue?'

"'The boldest men of the world, and the most experienced, admit that they have failed in winning her; they also declare that they still love her, and are now her devoted friends. The woman is an enigma!'

"These words excited me to a sort of intoxication; I was jealous of the past. Returning hastily toward the countess, whom I had left in the salon, I found her in the Gothic boudoir. She greeted me with a smile, asked me to sit by her, and questioned me on my literary work, seeming to take a keen interest in my answers, — especially when I explained my theory, which I did half in jest instead of employing the terms of a professor and explaining it dogmatically. She was much amused by the idea that the human will is a material force like that of steam; that nothing in the moral world can resist its power if a man accustoms himself to concentrate it, to hold it in hand, and to direct the propulsion of this fluid mass upon the consciousness of other men; that a man possessing this power could modify all things relating to humanity as he pleased, even the laws of nature. Fedora's objections to my theory proved her to possess a certain keenness of intellect. I took delight in flattering her with explanations, while I destroyed her feminine arguments with a word, drawing her attention to a fact of daily life, namely, sleep, — apparently the most common of all facts, yet an insoluble problem for the man of science. This piqued her curiosity. She even remained silent while I told her that ideas were organ-

ized and perfected beings living in a world invisible, — citing in proof thereof that the thoughts of Descartes, Diderot, and Napoleon had led, and were still leading, an epoch. I had the honor to amuse her, and she left me with an invitation to visit her again; in the language of courts, she gave me the *grandes entrées.*

"Whether it were that I took the formulas of politeness for words of real meaning, or that Fedora thought me a man of rising fame and wished to add to her menagerie of savants, it is certain that I fancied I pleased her. I called up all my physiological knowledge and my previous studies of womanhood, to help me in examining this singular person and her manners, for the rest of the evening. Hidden in the recess of a window, I pried into her thoughts as expressed by her bearing; I studied her by-play as mistress of the house, — passing to and fro, sitting down, conversing, calling to one man, questioning another, and leaning, as she listened, against the lintel of a door. I noticed a soft and breezy motion in her walk, an undulation of her graceful dress, a potent, seductive charm, which made me suddenly incredulous of her virtue. Though Fedora now denied herself to love, she must once have been a passionate woman; the signs of it were in her choice of attitudes. She leaned against the panelling coquettishly, like a woman about to fall, yet ready to fly if some too ardent look affrighted her. Her arms were lightly crossed; she seemed to breathe-in words, to hear and welcome them with her eyes, while her whole person exhaled sentiment. The fresh, red lips were defined upon a skin of dazzling whiteness. Her brown hair brought out clearly the orange tints of her

eyes, which were rayed or veined like a Florentine agate, — seeming to add by their expression a subtile charm to her speech. The lines of the bust and waist had a grace that was all their own. A rival might have called the heavy eyebrows, which nearly met each other, hard; or condemned the light down which defined the outlines of the face. To my eyes, passion was imprinted everywhere. Love was written on the Italian eyelids, on the fine shoulders, worthy of the Venus of Milo, on each feature of her face, on the under lip, which was a shade too heavy, and slightly shadowed. She was more than a woman, — she was a history, a romance. Yes, this rich feminity, this harmonious assemblage of lines, these promises of passion given by this noble structure, were tempered and subdued by unfailing reserve, and a singular modesty, which contrasted strangely with the whole expression of her person.

"Perhaps it needed a sagacious mind to trace the signs of a sensuous and pleasure-loving destiny in that nature. Let me explain my thought more clearly. There were two women in Fedora, separated, it may be, like the head from the body. The head alone seemed amorous; before looking at a man she appeared to make ready her glance, as if some mysterious, inexplicable thought were passing through her mind, and causing a tumult in those brilliant eyes. Either my science was imperfect and I had still many secrets to discover in the moral world, or else the countess did really possess a noble soul, whose feelings and emanations gave to her countenance the charm which subjugates and fascinates, the charm whose power is a moral one, and all

the greater because it harmonizes with the sympathies of desire. I left the house bewitched and captivated by Fedora, intoxicated with her luxury, thrilled in every noble, vicious, good, and evil fibre of my heart. As I felt this life, this emotion, this exaltation within me, I fancied I understood the attraction which drew about her artists, diplomatists, statesmen, or brokers lined with metal like their desks; doubtless they came to find in her presence the same delirious emotion which made my whole being vibrate within me, lashed my blood through every vein, exasperated each nerve, and quivered in my brain. She belonged to none that she might retain them all. A coquette is a woman who does not love. 'It may be,' I said to Rastignac, 'that she was married, or sold to some old man, and that the remembrance of her first marriage has given her a disgust for love.'

"I returned on foot from the faubourg Saint-Honoré where Fedora lived. Nearly the whole of Paris lay between her house and the rue des Cordiers; the way seemed short, and yet the night was cold. To undertake the conquest of Fedora in the depth of winter, and a severe winter, with only thirty francs in the world, and the distance between us so great, now seems madness. None but a poor young man can know what such a passion costs, in carriages, gloves, clothes, and linen. If love is kept platonic a trifle too long it becomes ruinous. There is many a Lauzun in the Law School who can never aim at a love embowered on a first floor. And how could I, weak, delicate, ill-clothed, pale, and emaciated, presume to enter the lists with elegant young men faultlessly attired, curled and

cravatted better than the dandies of the Croatian Horse, driving their own tilburys, and cloaked with insolence? 'Bah, Fedora or death!' I cried to myself as I crossed a bridge, 'Fedora! she is fortune.' The beautiful Gothic boudoir, and the salon of Louis XIV. came back before my eyes; I saw the countess in her snow-white robe with its wide and graceful sleeves, her enticing attitudes, her tempting figure. When I reached my cold, bare, ill-kept attic room, I was still environed with a sense of Fedora's luxury. The contrast was an evil counsellor; many a crime dates from such a moment. Trembling with rage, I cursed my decent and honest poverty, my fruitful garret where so many thoughts had sprung into existence. I called on God, on the devil, on social order, on my father, and the whole universe to answer for my fate and my unhappiness; I went hungry to bed, muttering ludicrous imprecations, but fully resolved to win Fedora. That woman's heart was the last ticket in my fortune's lottery.

"I will spare you an account of my earlier visits to the countess, and come at once to the pith of my story. While endeavoring to reach the woman's soul I tried to win her mind, and turn her vanity in my favor. To make her love secure, I gave her many reasons to love herself. I never left her in a state of indifference. Women want emotions at any price, and I gave them to her; I preferred to have her angry with me rather than indifferent. Though at first, supported by a firm will, and the desire to make myself beloved, I gained a certain ascendency over her, my passion soon increased, and I was no longer master of myself; I fell

among true emotions, I lost my self-control, and became desperately in love. I do not know exactly what it is that we call in poetry, or in conversation, *love;* but the sentiment that suddenly developed itself in my dual nature I never have seen represented, either in the stilted and rhetorical phraseology of Jean-Jacques (whose very room I might then be occupying), or in the cold imaginings of our two literary centuries, nor yet in the paintings of Italy. The view of the Lake of Bienne, a few melodies of Rossini, Murillo's Madonna, now in possession of Marshal Soult, the letters of La Lescombat, certain scattered words in collections of social anecdotes, above all, the prayers of ecstatics, and a few passages in our *fabliaux*, are alone able to transport me into the divine regions of my first love. Nothing in human language, no translation of human thought by means of paintings, statues, words, or sounds, can give the vigor, the truth, the completeness, the suddenness of emotion in the soul. He who talks of art, talks of falsehood, — art is inadequate. Love passes through an infinite number of transformations before it mingles forever with our life, and dyes it everlastingly with the color of its flame. The secret of this imperceptible infusion escapes the analysis of artist or writer. True passion is expressed in cries and moans that are wearisome to a cool man. We must love sincerely before we can share in the savage roar of Lovelace as we read 'Clarissa Harlowe.' Love is a fresh spring, bubbling up among its watercresses, a brook purling through flowery meads, and over pebbles, flowing, eddying, changing its nature, and its aspect at every influx, and flinging itself at last into

an immeasurable ocean which seems to half-formed spirits only a monotonous level, but in whose depths great souls are sunk in endless contemplation.

"How shall I dare describe these transitory shades of feeling, these nothings which are so infinite, these words whose accents exhaust all treasures of language, these looks more pregnant than the richest poem? Before each mystic scene by which insensibly we come to love a woman, there opens an abyss which engulfs all human poetry. Ah! how can we reproduce in empty words, like explanatory notes, these keen, mysterious agitations of the soul, when language fails us to explain the visible mystery of beauty? What allurements! What hours did I not spend plunged in the ineffable ecstasy of seeing her! Happy — with what? I know not. If at times her face was bathed in light, some phenomenon took place upon it which made it luminous; the almost imperceptible down upon the fine and delicate skin softly defined its outlines with the charm which we admire in distant horizons, when they are hazy in the sunlight. It seemed to me that daylight caressed her as it blended with her, or that a light emanated from her radiant face more brilliant than light itself; then some shadow passing across that shining countenance produced a color which varied its expression with the changing tints. Often a thought seemed to stand forth upon her brow; her eye appeared to blush, the lids quivered, her features gently undulated, stirred by a smile; the speaking coral of her lips grew animated, parted, then closed again; certain reflections of her hair which I cannot describe threw a brown tone upon

her forehead; and by these changes Fedora spoke. Each shade of beauty gave new feasts to my eyes, revealed graces still unknown to my heart. I sought to read a feeling, a hope, in the phases of her countenance. These mute communications travelled from soul to soul like sound through an echo, and gave me passing joys which left undying impressions. Her voice caused me delirious excitements which I controlled with difficulty. Imitating some prince of Lorraine, — I forget who he was, — I could have taken a burning coal in my hand and never felt it, had she passed her delicate fingers through my hair. My love was no longer admiration or desire, it was a spell, a fatality. Often beneath my garret roof I saw Fedora, indistinctly, in her own room; dreamily I shared her life. If she were suffering, I suffered, and on the morrow I said to her, 'You were ill last night?' Again and suddenly, like a flash of light, she would strike the pen from my hand, and scare away Science and study, till they fled disconsolate; she forced me to think of nothing but the attitude in which I last had seen her; sometimes I sought her myself in the world of apparitions, saluting her as Hope, praying that she would speak to me with her silvery voice, and then I awoke to weep.

"One day after promising to go with me to the theatre she suddenly refused to keep her promise, and begged me not to visit her that evening. In despair at a disappointment which had cost me a day's labor and, if I must own it, my last penny, I went to the theatre where she was to have been, wishing to see the play she had desired to see. I had scarcely taken my seat before an

electric shock fell on my heart. A voice said to me, 'She is here.' I turned and saw Fedora sitting at the back of her box, withdrawn into the shadow. My eyes were not misled, they found her with instant keenness; my soul flew to her as an insect flies to its flower. How came my senses to have received this intimation? Such things seem surprising to superficial minds, but these effects of our internal being are really as simple as the ordinary phenomena of our external life; and therefore I was not astonished, but angry. My researches into the nature of moral force, so little understood, made me notice various living proofs of my theory in my own passion. This union of scholar and lover, a positive idolatry with scientific passion, was certainly a strange thing. Science was often gratified by some circumstance which led the lover to despair, and then, when Science was about to prevail, the lover drove it far away from him and recovered happiness.

"Fedora saw me and grew serious; I annoyed her. At the end of the first act I went to her box. She was alone and I remained. Though we had never spoken of love I foresaw an explanation. I had never told her my secret, yet a species of expectancy existed between us; she told me all her plans of amusement, and asked me every evening with friendly anxiety whether I should be there on the morrow; she questioned me with a glance when she said a witty thing, as if to show that she cared to please me exclusively; if I were aloof or sulky she became caressing; if she were vexed she allowed me the right to question her; if, by chance, I were guilty of some fault she made me entreat her long before she pardoned me. These quarrels, in which we both

found pleasure, were those of love. She displayed such grace and coquetry, that to me they were full of happiness. But at the moment of our present meeting such intimacy seemed suddenly suspended, and we faced each other almost as strangers. The countess was icy; as for me, I foresaw disaster.

"'Come home with me,' she said, when the play ended.

"When we left the theatre the weather had changed; it was raining and snowing. Fedora's carriage could not be brought up to the door of the theatre. Seeing a well-dressed woman obliged to cross the boulevard, a street-porter held an umbrella over her head, and asked for his fee when we were seated in the carriage. I had nothing; I would have sold ten years of my life for ten sous at that moment. All that makes man and his vanity was crushed down in me by that infernal momentary pain. My answer, 'I have no money with me, my good fellow,' was said in a hard tone that came from my mortified pride,—said by me, the brother of that man, by me who knew so well the sorrows of poverty, though once I might have given away my hundreds and thousands. The footman pushed aside the porter, and the horses started.

"On the way home Fedora either was or pretended to be preoccupied, answering my questions by disdainful monosyllables. I kept silence. It was a dreadful moment. When we reached the salon she sat down beside the fireplace. After the footman had made up the fire and retired from the room, she turned to me with an indefinable air and said with a species of solemnity:

"'Since my return to France, my wealth has tempted

a number of young men. I have received declarations of love which might well gratify my pride; I have met men whose attachment was so deep and sincere that they would have married me had I been the same poor girl I formerly was. In short, I wish you to know, Monsieur de Valentin, that wealth and titles have been offered to me; and I also wish to tell you that I have never again received the persons who were so ill-advised as to speak to me of love. If my affection for you were trifling I would not give you this warning, in which there is more friendship than pride. A woman lays herself open to a rebuff if, supposing herself loved, she refuses unasked a feeling that must flatter her. I know the scenes of Arsinoë and Araminta, and I have considered the answers which I might receive under similar circumstances. But I hope that I shall not be so unfairly judged to-day by a man of superior discernment when I thus frankly show him my heart.'

"She spoke with the coolness of a lawyer or notary explaining a deed. The clear, seductive ring of her voice betrayed not the slightest emotion; her face and her bearing, always dignified and proper, now seemed to have put on a diplomatic coldness and reserve. She had, no doubt, thought over her words and mapped out the scene. Oh! my dear friend, when certain women find pleasure in rending our hearts, when they know they are plunging a dagger into our souls and turning it in the wound, they are adorable; such women either love, or wish to be loved. Some day they will recompense us for our sufferings, as God, they say, will reward our good deeds; they will return us pleasures an hundredfold for every hurt whose anguish they are

able to perceive; their cruelty is full of passion. But to be tortured by a woman who slaughters us with indifference, is an untold agony. At this moment Fedora blindly trod under foot every hope that was in me, broke my life, destroyed my future, with the cold carelessness and innocent cruelty of a child who tears the wings of a butterfly for curiosity.

"'Later,' she continued, 'I feel sure that you will understand the solid affection which I offer to my friends. To them I am always, as you will find, kind and devoted. I could give my life for them, but you would despise me if I submitted to a love I do not share. I will say no more. You are the only man to whom I have ever said these last words.'

"At first I could not answer her, speech failed me. I could scarcely master the tempest that rose within me; but presently I drove back my feelings and said with a smile: —

"'If I say that I love you, you will banish me; if I show indifference, you will punish me. Priests and women never wholly unfrock themselves. But, madame, silence is non-committal; you will permit me, therefore, to remain silent. The fact that you have given me this sisterly warning shows that you feared to lose me, and that must needs gratify my pride. But let us lay aside personalities. You are perhaps the only woman with whom I could discuss from a philosophical point of view these resolutions of yours, which are so contrary to the laws of nature. Comparing you with all others of your kind, you are a phenomenon. Well, then, let us try, in good faith, to discover the cause of this singular physiological anomaly. Can

there be in you, as in other women who are full of self-esteem and amorous of their own perfections, a sentiment of refined selfishness which leads you to look with horror on the thought of belonging to any man, of abdicating your will and being subjected to a conventional superiority which you despise? If that be so, you seem to me more beautiful than ever. Perhaps you were maltreated in your earliest love? Or, it may be that the value you naturally attach to your exquisite figure makes you dread the results of maternity; that indeed may be your secret reason for refusing to be loved. Or have you another still more secret, — some imperfection, that keeps you virtuous? Do not be angry; I am merely discussing, studying; I am a thousand leagues away from love. Nature, which makes persons blind from their birth, can very well create women who are deaf, dumb, and blind to love. You are indeed a valuable subject for medical observation — you do not know how valuable. You may well have a legitimate disgust for men; I approve of it, — they seem to me, one and all, ugly and odious. But you are right,' I added, as I felt the swelling of my heart. 'Of course you despise us; where is the man who is worthy of you?'

"I need not tell you any more of the sarcasms I poured out upon her, laughing. The bitterest word, the sharpest irony drew no movement or gesture of annoyance from her. She listened with the usual smile upon her lips and in her eyes, — that smile which she wore as a garment, always the same, to friends, to mere acquaintances, to strangers.

"'Am I not amiable to let you put me on the table

of a dissecting-room?' she said, seizing a moment when I was silent. 'You see,' she continued, laughing, 'I have no foolish susceptibilities in friendship. Many women would punish your impertinence by shutting their doors against you.'

"'You can banish me without being asked to give a reason for your severity.' As I said the words I felt that I might kill her if she dismissed me.

"'You are absurd,' she said, laughing.

"'Have you ever reflected,' I continued, 'upon the effects of a violent love? It has often happened that a man driven to despair has murdered his mistress.'

"'Well,' she answered, coldly, 'it is better to die than to live unhappy. A man of such vehement passions would certainly abandon his wife, and leave her with the wolf at the door, after squandering her fortune.'

"This arithmetic dumbfounded me. I saw the abyss that lay between that woman and me. We could never comprehend each other.

"'Adieu,' I said, coldly.

"'Adieu,' she answered, with a friendly inclination of her head, 'until to-morrow.'

"I looked at her steadily for a moment, flinging toward her, like a projectile, all the love which I now cast from me. She was standing erect, and replied to my look with a commonplace smile, the odious smile of a marble statue, seeming to express love, but cold as stone.

"Ah! Émile, conceive the sufferings in which I returned home, through the sleet and rain, walking for three miles along the icy, slippery quays, having lost

all! Oh, to feel that she never so much as knew of my misery or my poverty; she thought me, like herself, rich, and driving in a carriage. What ruin, what deception! It was no longer a question of money, all the fortunes of my soul were lost. I walked, I knew not how or where. Discussing with myself the words of that strange conversation, I lost myself so utterly in the effort to explain them that I ended by doubting even the nominal value of ideas and words. But still I loved, — I loved that cold woman, whose heart desired to be won every night, and on the morrow, effacing the promises of the day before, expected to be wooed again.

"As I turned through the wickets at the Institute, a feverish ague seized me. I remembered that I was fasting. I had no money, not a copper coin. To add to my misfortunes, the rain had destroyed my hat. How could I approach an elegant woman, and enter a salon with a hat that was no longer presentable? Thanks to my extreme care, — all the while cursing a fashion which condemns us to exhibit the nap of a hat by carrying it constantly in our hands, — I had kept mine hitherto in fair condition. Without looking either brand-new or amorphously old, with a nap that was neither worn nor immaculate, it could very well pass for the hat of a careful man; but now its social existence was at an end: it was soaked, sodden, done for, an actual rag, — fit representative of its owner. For lack of thirty sous to hire a cab, I had lost my pains-taking elegance. Ah! how many sacrifices, disregarded sacrifices, had I not made to Fedora during the last three months. I had often spent the money

I needed for my week's bread, to go and see her for a single hour. To leave my work and go without food was nothing; but to cross the streets of Paris and avoid being splashed, to run and escape rain, and then to enter her presence as well-dressed and composed as the dandies who surrounded her, — ah! to a poet, a lover and a man absorbed in thought, the task was one of unspeakable difficulty. My happiness, my love, depended on the spotless condition of my only white waistcoat! I must renounce the sight of her if I were muddy, or the rain had overtaken me. Not to have five sous so that the street shoe-black might remove some trifling spot of mud, was banishment from her presence.

"My passion was increased by these petty tortures, which were, however, enormous to an irritable man. A poor lover is called upon for sacrifices which he cannot even speak of to a woman bred in luxury and elegance; such women see life through a prism which tints the world of men and things with golden light. Optimist through selfishness, cruel by the laws of good manners, these women excuse themselves from reflecting on the character of their pleasures, and find absolution for their indifference to the misery of others in the rush of their enjoyments. To them a penny is never a million, but the millions are pennies. If a poor love must win its way with mighty sacrifices, it must also cover them delicately with a veil, and bury them in silence; but the rich man, prodigal of money and of time, profits by the worldliness of public opinion which throws a glamour over the extravagances of his amorous devotion. For him silence may have a voice, and the veil a grace; but my horrible poverty caused me

intolerable sufferings, and yet forbade that I should let it say for me, 'I love, I die, behold my sacrifice!' But, after all, was it sacrifice? was I not amply rewarded by the happiness I felt in immolating myself for her? The countess had given the utmost value, and brought excessive enjoyment to the smallest incidents of my life. Formerly, in the matter of dress, I had been careless and indifferent. I now respected my clothes as if they were another self. Between a wound on my own body and a rent in my coat I should not have hesitated a moment.

"Émile, you must surely now perceive my situation, and understand the rage of thoughts, of ever-increasing frenzy that hurried me along from that fatal interview. A sort of infernal joy possessed me as I felt myself at the apex of all misfortunes. I tried to fancy it might be a culminating point, and to think it of good augury; but alas! evil has resources without end.

"The door of my inn was open. I noticed a light coming through the heart-shaped hole cut in the blinds. Pauline and her mother were sitting up for me. I heard my name, and paused a moment to listen.

"'Raphael is much nicer than the student in number seven,' Pauline was saying. 'His blond hair is such a pretty color! Don't you think there is something in his voice — I can't tell what — that stirs one's heart? And then, though he has a rather haughty air, he is so good, and his manners are so distinguished. I call him truly handsome, and I should think all women would fall in love with him.'

"'You speak as if you loved him yourself,' said Madame Gaudin.

"'Oh, I love him as a brother!' cried Pauline, laughing. 'I should be shamefully ungrateful if I did not. Has n't he taught me music, drawing, grammar, — in fact, all I know. You don't pay much attention to my progress, mamma; but I am really getting so well educated that before long I can give lessons myself, and then we can keep a servant.'

"I drew back softly, made a noise at the door, and then entered the room to take my lamp, which Pauline hastened to light. The poor child had poured a balm upon my wounds. Her simple praise gave me some trifling courage. I needed to believe in myself once more, and to get an impartial opinion on the real value of my merits. My hopes, thus revived, reflected possibly on the way I saw things. Perhaps, moreover, I had never seriously noticed the scene daily offered to my eyes by these two women at work in their chamber; but now I enjoyed it as a living and delightful picture of the modest lives so faithfully reproduced by Flemish painters. The mother, seated in the chimney-corner, was knitting stockings, a kindly smile resting on her lips. Pauline was painting screens; her colors and brushes, spread on a little table, spoke to the eye with charming effect. She herself had risen to get my lamp, whose full light now fell upon her face. A man must indeed have been subjugated by a blinding passion had he failed to admire the rosy, transparent fingers, the ideal beauty of her head, and her maidenly attitude. Night-time and silence both lent their charm to this scene of quiet labor, this tranquil fireside. Such labor, steadily and cheerfully maintained, told of Christian resignation drawn from the highest emotions.

An indefinable harmony existed between these women and the things about them. Fedora's luxury was hard; it awakened evil thoughts in my mind, while this humble poverty and cheerful goodness refreshed my spirit. It may have been that I was humbled in the presence of luxury; while beside these two women in their brown room, where life, simplified to nature, seemed to find its resting-place in the emotions of the heart, I was, perhaps, reconciled with myself through the sense of exercising that protection of my sex which man is so eager to have acknowledged. As I went up to Pauline she looked at me with an almost motherly expression, crying out, as, with trembling hands, she hastily placed the lamp upon the table: —

"'Heavens! how pale you are! Ah, he is wet through! Let my mother dry your clothes. Monsieur Raphael,' she added after a momentary pause, 'you are fond of milk; we have some nice cream to-night, — won't you taste it?' So saying, she sprang like a little cat to a china bowl full of milk, which she held up to my lips so prettily that I hesitated.

"'You can't refuse me?' she said in an altered voice.

"Our two prides understood each other. Pauline grieved for her poverty, and reproached me for my haughtiness. I was greatly touched. The cream was doubtless intended for their breakfast the next morning, but nevertheless I accepted it. The poor girl tried to hide her pleasure, but it sparkled in her eyes.

"'I needed it,' I said to her, sitting down. A pained look crossed her face. 'Do you remember, Pauline, that passage in Bossuet, where he depicts God

as rewarding a cup of cold water more richly than a victory?'

"'Yes,' she said, and her bosom throbbed like a bird in the hands of a child.

"'Well, as we must soon part,' I continued, speaking unsteadily, 'let me show you my gratitude for all the kindness you and your mother have bestowed upon me.'

"'Oh, don't let us reckon such things!' she said, laughing; but her laugh hid an emotion that pained me.

"'My piano,' I continued without seeming to hear her words, 'is one of Erard's best instruments. I want you to accept it. You can do so without scruple, for I could not take it with me on the journey I am about to undertake.'

"The tone in which I spoke may have enlightened them, for the two women seemed to understand my meaning. They looked at me with terrified curiosity. The affection for which I had vainly searched in the cold regions of the great world was here, beside me,— genuine, without display, but earnest, and perhaps lasting.

"'You must not take life too hard,' said the mother. 'Remain here with us. My husband is certainly on his way home. To-night I read the gospel of Saint John, while Pauline held our key suspended on a Bible; and the key turned. That is a sure sign that Gaudin is well and prospering. Pauline tried it for you and for the young man in number seven; your key turned and the other did not. We shall all be rich; Gaudin will come back a millionnaire; I dreamed of him in

a ship full of snakes; fortunately, the waves were rough, for that means gold and precious stones from foreign parts.'

"These friendly and foolish words, like the vague songs of mothers putting their babes to sleep, restored me to some calmness. The look and tone of the good woman were full of that gentle cordiality which cannot efface grief, but still does soften, soothe, and allay it. More perceptive than her mother, Pauline watched me anxiously; her intelligent eyes seemed to guess my life and my future. I thanked them both with an inclination of my head, and then I left the room, fearing to show my feelings. Once alone under the roof, I took my grief to bed with me. My fatal imagination invented project after project, all baseless, and prompted me to impossible resolutions. When a man drags himself through the wreck of his fortune, some resources still remain for him, but for me there was nothing — there was nothingness. Ah! friend, we are too ready to blame the poor. Let us be indulgent to the results of that worst of all social dissolvents, poverty. Where poverty reigns, neither purity, nor crime, nor virtue, nor mind, can be said to exist. I was now without ideas, without strength, like a young girl on her knees before a tiger. A man without money and without a passion is his own master; but an unhappy being who loves belongs to himself no longer, — he cannot even kill himself. Love gives us a sort of worship for ourselves; we respect another life within our own; it then becomes the most horrible of all sufferings, — the suffering that has hope in it, hope that makes us willing to endure

torture. I fell asleep, resolving to go to Rastignac the next day, and tell him of Fedora's strange conduct.

"'Ha, ha!' cried Eugène, as he saw me enter his rooms at nine o'clock in the morning. 'I know what brings you here; Fedora has dismissed you. A few kind souls, jealous of your power over the countess have spread the report of your marriage. God knows the stuff your rivals have talked, and the calumnies they have told of you.'

"'That explains everything!' I cried.

"I recollected my insolent speeches to the countess, and felt that her forbearance had been sublime. I now thought myself a brute who had not been made to suffer enough, and I saw in her gentleness the patient charity of love.

"'Not so fast,' said the prudent Gascon. 'Fedora has the natural penetration of a selfish woman; she may have taken your measure at the time when you thought only of her wealth and luxury; in spite of your caution she may then have read your mind. She is so dissimulating herself that she cannot endure dissimulation in others. I fear,' he added, 'that I have started you on a bad road. In spite of Fedora's refinement of mind and manners, the woman herself seems to me as hard and imperious as all other women who enjoy pleasure by the head. Happiness for her is ease of life and social enjoyment; as for sentiment or feeling, they are merely a rôle she likes to play. She would make you very unhappy; you would end in being her chief footman —'

"Rastignac spoke as to a deaf man. I interrupted his discourse, and told him, with apparent gayety, of my financial position.

"'Last night,' he replied, 'a stroke of ill-luck carried off every penny that I could command. If it were not for that commonplace accident I would share my purse with you. But come and breakfast at the café; we will have some oysters, and perhaps they'll give us good advice.'

"He dressed himself, and ordered his tilbury; then, like two millionnaires, we betook ourselves to the Café de Paris, with the assurance of those bold speculators who live on imaginary capital. This devil of a Gascon literally confounded me with the ease of his manners and his imperturbable aplomb. Just as we were taking coffee after a delicious and well-chosen repast, Rastignac, who kept bowing right and left to a crowd of young men remarkable for their personal appearance and also for the elegance of their attire, said to me as he saw another of these dandies enter the room, 'Here's your man;' then he signed to a gentleman well-gloved and cravatted, who was looking round him for a table.

"'That fellow,' whispered Rastignac in my ear, 'wears the Legion of honor for having published works he can't understand. He is a man of science, historian, romance-writer, and journalist; he owns quarters, thirds, halves, in I don't know how many stage plays, and he's as ignorant as Don Miguel's mule. He is n't a man, he's a name, a ticket. He takes very good care never to commit himself to a scrap of writing; he's shrewd enough to trick a whole congress. To explain him in one sentence, he is a mongrel in morals, — neither a complete scoundrel nor an honest man. But he fought a duel; the world asks nothing more, and calls him an honorable man — Well, my excellent and

honorable friend, how is Your Intelligence?' said Rastignac to the new-comer, who now seated himself at the adjoining table.

"'Neither well nor ill. I am worn out with work. I have now in my hands all the necessary material for some very curious historical memoirs, and I don't know to whom to attribute them. It worries me, for if I don't make haste, memoirs will get out of fashion.'

"'Are they contemporaneous, or ancient history, or court memoirs, or what?'

"'They are about the Diamond Necklace.'

"'A downright miracle!' said Rastignac in my ear, with a laugh; then, turning again to the speculator, he said, introducing me, 'Monsieur de Valentin is a friend of mine, whom I present to you as a future literary celebrity. He had an aunt belonging to the old court, a marchioness, and for the last two years he has been working at a royalist history of the Revolution;' then, leaning toward this singular man of literary business, he added in a lower tone, 'He is a man of talent, but a soft fellow who will do your memoirs for you and give them his aunt's name for three hundred francs a volume.'

"'That will suit me,' said the other, pulling up his cravat. 'Waiter, my oysters, quick!'

"'Yes, but you must give me twenty-five louis for my commission, and pay him for a volume in advance,' said Rastignac.

"'No, no. I won't advance more than a hundred and fifty francs, and then I shall be more sure of getting the work done promptly.'

"Rastignac repeated this mercantile agreement to

me in a low voice. Then, without consulting me, he said to the other man, 'That's a bargain; when can we see you again, to settle the affair?'

"'Well, come and dine here to-morrow evening at seven o'clock.'

"We rose to leave the café; Rastignac threw some change to the waiter, put the bill in his pocket, and we went out into the street. I was stupefied by the light and airy manner in which he had sold my respectable aunt, the Marquise de Montbauron.

"'I would rather embark for Brazil or go and teach algebra to the Indians, than soil the name of my family!'

"Rastignac burst out laughing:—

"'Oh! what a fool you are. In the first place get your hundred and fifty francs and do the memoirs. When they are done, idiot, you can refuse to give the name of your aunt. Madame de Montbauron, dead on the scaffold, her paniers, her paraphernalia, her beauty, her paint, and her slippers are worth a great deal more than six hundred francs. If the publisher won't pay you a proper price for your aunt, and all that, he can easily find a broken-down man of fashion who lives by his wits, or some smirched countess to sign the volumes.'

"'Oh!' I cried, 'why did I ever leave my virtuous garret?—the world has a base, vile side to it!'

"'Bah!' said Rastignac, 'you are talking poetry about a matter of business. You are nothing but a child. Listen; as for the memoirs, the public will judge of them; as to my literary broker, has n't he spent eight years of his life at his business, and paid for his present

relations with publishers at the price of cruel experience? By sharing the profits of the book unequally with him, is n't your part in the affair much the noblest? Seventy-five francs are more to you than a thousand francs to him. Come, you can very well write those memoirs (works of art if ever they were any), when Diderot wrote six sermons for a hundred francs.'

"'It is a necessity,' I replied; 'and I know I ought to be grateful to you. Seventy-five francs are riches to me.'

"'More riches than you think for,' said Eugène, laughing. 'If Finot gives me a commission for the affair, of course you know it is yours. Let's go and drive in the bois de Boulogne,' he continued; 'you will meet your countess, and I'll show you the pretty little widow I am going to marry, — a charming person, a rather fat Alsacian. She reads Kant, Schiller, Jean-Paul, and lots of hydraulic books; she persists in asking for my opinion on them, and I'm obliged to pretend that I understand all that German sentimentality, and dote on a heap of ballads and things, which are positively forbidden me by my physician. I have n't yet broken her of literary enthusiasm. Would you believe it? she cries over Goethe, and I'm obliged to cry too, — that is, a little, out of policy; you see, my dear fellow, it is a matter of fifty thousand francs a year, and the prettiest little foot and the prettiest little hand in the world. Oh! if she only did not mispronounce her words with that horrible German accent she would be an accomplished woman.'

"We met Fedora, looking brilliant in a brilliant equipage. The coquettish creature bowed very cordially

and gave me a smile which I thought divine and full of love. Ah! once more I was happy, and thought myself beloved; I had the wealth and the treasures of passion; there was no poverty, no misery for me now. Gay, happy, pleased with everything, I thought Rastignac's mistress charming. The trees, the skies, the atmosphere, all nature seemed to copy Fedora's smile. Returning by the Champs-Élysées we went to Rastignac's hatter and tailor. The Diamond Necklace allowed me to put myself in battle-array for the struggle before me. In future, I could match the grace and elegance of the young men who revolved around Fedora. I went back to my garret and shut myself in; I sat down at my little window, tranquil apparently while inwardly bidding an eternal adieu to the sea of roofs, living in the future, dramatizing my life, discounting, before it came to me, love with all its joys. Ah! what tumults may shake a solitary life between the four walls of a garret! The human soul is a fairy; she transforms straws into diamonds; at a touch of her magic wand enchanted palaces spring up like the flowers of the field beneath the warm inspirations of the sun.

"On the morrow, about mid-day, Pauline knocked at my door and brought me — what do you suppose? a letter from Fedora! The countess asked me to take her to the Luxembourg, and then to the Museum and the Jardin des Plantes. 'A porter is waiting for the answer,' said Pauline, after a moment's silence. I wrote a hasty reply, which Pauline carried off. Then I dressed. Just as I had finished and was looking at myself with some satisfaction, a horrible thought crossed my mind, — 'Will Fedora drive, or go on foot? what if it

rains? will it be fine?' I did not own a copper farthing, and could not get one till I met Finot at night. Ah! how often in such crises of our youth does a poet pay dear for the intellectual force which he has acquired through toil and fasting? A thousand thoughts now pierced me like so many arrows. I looked at the sky, the weather was doubtful. If the worst came to the worst I might take a carriage by the day — but how could I have a moment's peace of mind in the midst of my happiness from the fear that I might not meet Finot at night? I felt I was not strong enough to bear such anxiety in presence of Fedora. Though I knew very well I should find nothing, I began a search through my room for imaginary coins; I rummaged everywhere, even to the straw mattress and my old boots. A prey to nervous excitement, I looked about the disordered room with haggard eyes. Can you understand the delirium that seized upon me when, opening the drawer of my writing-table for the seventh time in a sort of idle way which came of my despair, I beheld, caught in a crack of the wood, slyly hiding, but clean, brilliant, and shining like a rising star, a noble five-franc piece! Not asking the cause of its evasion or of its cruelty in escaping me so long, I kissed it as though it were a friend faithful in trouble, when suddenly my cry of delight was echoed in the room. I turned hastily and saw Pauline, who had turned pale.

"'I feared,' she said, 'that you were ill. The porter who brought the letter' — she interrupted herself and seemed to choke down her words, — 'but my mother has paid him,' she added quickly. Then she ran away with frolicsome, childlike grace. Poor little one! I

wished her all the happiness I now felt; I had within me the joy of the whole earth, and I would gladly have given to the unfortunate some part of that which I seemed to have stolen from them.

"We are nearly always right in our presentiments of evil, — the countess had sent away her carriage. With one of those caprices which pretty women themselves do not always understand, she chose to walk to the Jardin des Plantes along the boulevards. 'But it will rain,' I said to her. She took pleasure in contradicting me. It so happened that the weather continued fair while we crossed the Luxembourg. As we left the gardens a heavy cloud which I had been watching with anxiety let fall a few drops, and I called a coach. When we reached the boulevards the rain was over and the sky clear. I was about to dismiss the carriage at the Museum, but Fedora begged me to keep it. What torture all this was to me! To talk with her, repressing the secret anxiety which was no doubt written on my face in a fixed and idiotic smile; to wander through the shrubberies of the Jardin des Plantes and feel her arm within my own, — all this, in itself, was fantastically strange; it was as though I dreamed in open day. And yet her movements and actions, whether in walking, or pausing, or conversing, had nothing truly soft or loving about them, notwithstanding their alluring quality. When I tried to associate myself in some way with the current of her life, I was made aware of an inward and secret sharpness in her, something harsh, abrupt, even eccentric. Women without souls have nothing mellow in their gestures. We were not in unison, — neither in our will, nor even

in our steps. There are no words that clearly explain this indefinable material discord between two human beings; for we are not yet accustomed to recognize a thought in a movement. That phenomenon of our nature is felt instinctively, but so far it has never been formulated in words.

"During these violent paroxysms of my passion," continued Raphael after a pause, and as if he were answering some objection in his own mind, "I never dissected my sensations, or analyzed my pleasures, or counted the beatings of my heart, as the miser counts and weighs his gold. Oh, no! experience is now throwing its melancholy light upon those past events; memory brings back to me those scenes, those images, as in calm weather after a storm the waves cast fragment after fragment of a wreck upon the shore.

"'You can do me a great service,' said the countess, after a while, looking at me with a rather confused air. 'Having confided to you my antipathy to love, I feel more free to claim a kindness from you as a friend. You will thus,' she added, laughing, 'have twice as much merit in assisting me, — don't you think so?' I looked at her in despair. Untouched by any feeling for the man beside her, she was coaxing but not affectionate; she seemed to me to be playing the part of a consummate actress; then, suddenly, at a word, a look, a tone, my hopes revived; my love, reanimated, shone in my eyes; but again no answering sign appeared in hers, they sustained the gleams from mine without a change in their own clearness; they seemed, like those of tigers, to be lined with a metal foil. At that moment I hated her.

"'The influence of the Duc de Navarreins,' she said, in a soft, cajoling tone of voice, 'would be very useful to me with an all-powerful personage in Russia, whose intervention is necessary before I can obtain justice in a matter which concerns both my property and my position in society; I mean the recognition of my marriage by the Emperor. The Duc de Navarreins is, I think, your cousin. A letter from him would obtain all.'

"'I am yours,' I replied; 'command me.'

"'You are very kind,' she said, pressing my hand. 'Come and dine with me, and I will tell you everything as if you were my confessor.'

"So, then, this discreet, distrustful woman, from whom no one had yet obtained a word as to her own affairs, was about to consult me.

"'Ah! how thankful I am now for the reserve you have imposed upon me,' I cried; 'though I would have liked some harder task.'

"She now welcomed and accepted the intoxication in my glance, and gave herself freely to my admiration — surely she loved me! We reached her house. Fortunately my five-franc piece was enough to pay the coachman. I passed a delightful day alone with her, in her own home. It was the first time I had ever seen her thus. Until now the society around her, her conventional politeness, and her cold reserve, had always separated us, even at her sumptuous dinner-parties. But now I was with her as if I lived beneath her roof; she was mine, so to speak. My vagrant imagination burst all bounds, marshalled the events of life to suit my wishes, and plunged me into the delights of happy

love. Fancying myself her husband, I admired her busy about trifling things; it even gave me happiness to see her lay aside her hat and shawl. She left me alone for a time and returned with her hair charmingly arranged. Her pretty toilet had been made for me! During dinner, she paid me many attentions, and displayed all those little graces that seem nothing in themselves, yet are the half of life. When we were both seated on silken cushions beside a sparkling fire, surrounded by the delightful creations of oriental luxury; when I beheld so near to me the woman whose celebrated beauty moved all hearts, a woman difficult to conquer, yet now addressing me, and making me the object of her delightful coquetry, — the felicity of my mind and of my senses became actual suffering. I suddenly remembered the important matter about the memoirs, which I had agreed to arrange that night, and I rose to leave Fedora and keep my appointment.

"'What! going already?' she said, as she saw me take my hat.

"Ah, she loved me! at least I thought so as I heard her utter those few words in caressing tones. To prolong that ecstasy I would willingly have cut two years from the end of life for every hour that she thus granted to me. My happiness was the dearer for the loss of my only chance of money. It was midnight when at last she sent me away. But on the morrow my happiness cost me some remorse; I feared I had lost my opportunity in the affair of the memoirs, now of vital importance to me. I went to find Rastignac, and together we surprised the titular author of my coming work just as he was getting out of bed. Finot read me

a formal agreement, in which there was no mention of my aunt, and after it was signed he paid me one hundred and fifty francs in advance. We all three breakfasted together. When I had paid for my new hat, sixty *cachets* at thirty sous, and my debts, there remained only thirty francs; but all my difficulties were over for the time being. If I had allowed Rastignac to wholly persuade me, I might have become practically wealthy by adopting what he called 'the English system.' He wanted me to establish a credit and borrow money; declaring that loans sustained credit. According to his ideas the most solid capital in the world was the future. To hypothecate, as he said, my debts upon future contingencies, he gave my custom to his own tailor, an artist who *understood young men*, and who would let me alone till I married.

"From that day I abandoned the studious and monastic life which I had led for three years. I went habitually to Fedora's house, where I tried to surpass in assumption and impertinence the heroes of her coterie. Thinking that I was forever quit of poverty, I recovered my freedom of mind. I surpassed my rivals, and was admitted to be a man of power and fascination. Yet clever persons were not wanting who said of me, 'So intelligent a young man keeps his passions to his head.' They praised my mind at the expense of my heart. 'Happy fellow, not to love,' they cried; 'if he were in love he could not keep his gayety, his animation.' And yet I was amorously stupid in presence of Fedora. Alone with her, I found nothing to say; or if I spoke I only misrepresented love.

I was mournfully gay, like a courtesan who tries to hide a cruel mortification. Still, I endeavored to make myself indispensable to her life, her happiness, and her vanity. I was a slave waiting beside her, a plaything to be ordered about. After wasting my days in this manner, I went home to work all night, seldom sleeping more than two or three hours in the morning. But not possessing, like Rastignac, the habits of the 'English system,' I was soon without a penny. From that day, my dear friend, I became a hanger-on without successes, a dandy without money, a lover without rights. I fell back into the precarious life, the cold, hopeless, heavy misery carefully hidden under the deceitful appearance of luxury. My earlier sufferings returned to me, but they were less acute. I was now familiar with their terrible crises. Often the cakes and tea so parsimoniously offered in great houses were my only nourishment. Sometimes the countess's grand dinners fed me for two days. I employed my time, my powers, and my scientific observation in penetrating, step by step, Fedora's impenetrable character. Up to this time hope or despair had influenced my judgment. I saw her, by turns, a loving woman or the most unfeeling of her sex.

"But such alternations of joy and sadness became intolerable. I tried to kill my love, and so put an end to this awful struggle. A noxious light darted at times into my soul and showed me the dark abysses between us. Fedora justified all my distrust. Never did I see a tear in her eye. A tender scene at a theatre left her cold and jesting. All her wit and cleverness were reserved for her own ends; she had

no conception of the sorrows or happiness of others. In short, she had once more tricked me! Happy in offering her a sacrifice, I humiliated myself and went to see my relation the Duc de Navarreins, an egoist, who blushed for my poverty, and had done me too many wrongs not to feel an aversion to me. He received me with the cold politeness which makes every word and gesture an insult; his uneasy air actually excited my pity. I was ashamed, for his sake, at such pettiness in the midst of such grandeur. He spoke of his losses, occasioned by a fall in the three per cents, but I cut him short with a statement of the object of my visit. The instant change in his manner disgusted me — Well! my dear Émile, he came to see the countess, and I was set aside. Fedora exercised upon him all her enchantments. She completely won him; she managed the mysterious affair without consulting me; I had simply been her tool! She no longer looked at me when my cousin was present, and showed me less courtesy than on the day I first went to her house. One evening she humiliated me in presence of the duke with a gesture and a look that no words can describe. I left the house with a bursting heart, forming wild schemes of vengeance and retaliation.

"Sometimes I accompanied her to the opera, and there, beside her, filled with my love, I contemplated her beauty as I gave myself up to the influence of the music, spending my soul in the double joy of loving and of hearing my emotions echoed in the language of the musician. My passion was all about us, in the air, on the stage; triumphant everywhere except in the heart of my mistress. I took her hand; I studied

her features and her eyes, soliciting the fusion of our feelings in one of those sudden harmonies evoked by music which bring true hearts to vibrate in unison, but her hand was mute, her eyes said nothing. When the fire of my feelings, issuing from every feature, struck sharply on her face she gave me that collected smile, that conventional sweetness which appears on the lips of every portrait exhibited in the Salon. She never listened to the music. The divine scores of Rossini, Cimarosa, Zingarelli reminded her of no sentiment, interpreted no poem of her life; her soul was arid. She sat there like an actor in presence of acting. Her opera-glass was turned incessantly from box to box; uneasy, though tranquil outwardly, she was a slave to the world of fashion; her box, her appearance, her toilet, her carriage, her person were all in all for her. You will often find persons of stalwart appearance whose heart is tender and delicate within an iron frame; but Fedora hid an iron heart within her slender and graceful body. My fatal perceptions tore off her disguises. If good breeding consists in forgetting ourselves for others, in keeping our tones and gestures to unfailing courtesy, and in pleasing those about us by rendering them pleased and satisfied with themselves, then Fedora, in spite of her apparent refinement, did not efface all signs of a plebeian origin; her forgetfulness of herself was false; her good manners, far from innate, were laboriously studied; her very politeness showed a tinge of servitude.

"And yet to those who pleased her, the countess's honeyed words seemed the expression of a kind heart, her pretentious exaggerations the utterance of a noble

enthusiasm. I alone had studied her artifices. I had stripped from her inner being the slight covering that sufficed the world, and was no longer the dupe of her trickeries; I knew to its depths that cat-like spirit. When some ninny complimented and praised her I felt ashamed for her. And yet I loved her, loved her ever! I hoped to melt the ice of her nature beneath the wings of a poet's love. Could I once have opened her heart to woman's tenderness, could I have taught her the sublimity of self-devotion, she would have seemed to me perfect, — an angel indeed. I loved her as a man, a lover, an artist, when to obtain her I ought never to have loved her at all. A high-living man of the world, or a cool speculator, could perhaps have won her. Vain and artful, she might have listened to the voice of vanity, or allowed herself to be entangled in the net of an intrigue; a hard and frigid nature might have controlled hers. Sharp pains cut me to the quick when I came face to face with her egotism. With anguish I imagined her some day alone in life, not knowing where to stretch her hands, and meeting no friendly looks on which to rest her own. One evening I had the courage to picture to her in startling colors her deserted old age, barren and devoid of interests. When I made her see the awful vengeance of denied and thwarted nature she gave me this shameless answer: —

"'I should still have my wealth; and gold can create around us all the feelings which we require for our comfort.'

"I left the house overcome by the logic of that luxury, of that woman, of that society; and bitterly I re-

pented of my mad idolatry. I would not love Pauline because she was poor; was the rich Fedora wrong because she repulsed me? Our conscience is an infallible judge, provided we do not kill it. 'Fedora,' cried a sophistical voice within me, 'neither loves nor repulses any one. She is free; but she once gave herself for gold. Lover or husband, the Russian count possessed her. Temptation will surely come to her some day. Await it.' Neither virtuous nor faulty, the woman lived apart from humanity, in a sphere of her own, were it hell or paradise. This mysterious female, robed in cashmeres and laces, set every fibre of my heart, every human emotion within me, — pride, ambition, love, curiosity, — in motion.

"About this time, a fashionable caprice, or that desire to seem original which pursues us all, had led to a mania for attending a little theatre on the boulevard. The countess expressed a wish to see the befloured face of an actor, who was much praised by certain critics, and I obtained the honor of taking her to the first representation of some wretched farce. The cost of the box was scarcely five francs; but even so, I did not possess a single farthing. Having half a volume of the memoirs still to write, I could not apply to Finot, and Rastignac, my private providence, was absent.

"This perpetual pauperism was the evil genius of my life. Once, as we left the Bouffons on a rainy night, Fedora insisted on her footman's calling me a cab, in spite of my assurances that I liked the rain, and was, moreover, going to a gambling-house. She did not guess my real reasons from the embarrassment of my manner, nor from the half-jesting sadness of my words.

The lives of young men are subjected to singular accidents of this sort. As I drove along, every turn of the wheels awakened thoughts that burned my heart. I endeavored in vain to escape from the coach while it was still moving. I burst into convulsive laughter, and then sat rigid in gloomy stillness, like a man in the stocks. When I reached the house, Pauline interrupted my first hesitating words: 'If you have no change,' she said, 'let me pay the coachman.' Ah! the music of Rossini was nothing to the charm of those words!

"But to return to the Funambules. To be able to escort the countess, I thought of pawning the gold setting round my mother's picture. Though the Mont-de-Piété had always appeared to my mind as the high-road to the galleys, yet I now felt that I would rather take my bed and pledge it there than beg a charity. The glance of a man from whom you solicit money is so wounding! Certain loans cost us our honor, just as certain refusals from the lips of a friend dispel our last illusions. When I re-entered the Hôtel Saint-Quentin, Pauline was painting her screens, but her mother had gone to bed. Casting a furtive look at the bed, whose curtains were slightly raised, I thought I perceived that Madame Gaudin was asleep.

"'Something troubles you,' said Pauline, laying down her brushes.

"'My dear child, you can do me a great service,' I answered. She gave me such a happy glance that I quivered. 'Can she love me?' I thought. 'Pauline,' I said, and I sat down by her to study her. She guessed my thoughts, for the very tones of my voice

were a question; then she lowered her eyes, and I watched her, believing I could read her heart as plainly as I could my own, so pure, so artless, was her face.

"'You love me?' I cried.

"'A little, — passionately, — not at all!' she answered, laughing.

"No, she did not love me. Her jesting tone and pretty gesture only meant the frolicsome gratitude of a young girl. I therefore told her my distress, explained the embarrassment in which I found myself, and begged her to help me. 'Oh, Monsieur Raphael!' she said, 'you will not go yourself to the Mont-de-Piété, and yet you send me!' I blushed, confounded by a child's logic. Then she took my hand, as if to compensate me by a caress for the truth of her exclamation. 'Indeed, I would go,' she said, 'but it is not necessary. This morning I found two five-franc pieces behind the piano, and I put them on your table; they must have slipped, without your noticing them, between the case and the wall.'

"'You will soon get your money, Monsieur Raphael,' said the good mother, putting her head from between the curtains, 'and I can very well lend you some till then.'

"'Oh, Pauline!' I cried, pressing her hand, 'I would I were rich.'

"'Bah! why?' she said with roguish air. Her hand trembled in mine and answered to the beatings of my heart; she quickly withdrew it and began to examine the palm of mine. 'You will marry a rich woman,' she said; 'but she will make you unhappy. Ah, my God, she will kill you! I am sure of it.' In her startled cry there seemed a sort of belief in the foolish superstitions of her mother.

"'You are very credulous, Pauline.'

"'Oh, it is certain!' she cried, looking at me with terror in her eyes; 'the woman you will love will kill you!' She took a brush and began to moisten her colors, showing signs of strong emotion. At that moment I would gladly have believed in her fancies. A man is never altogether miserable if he is superstitious. Superstition means hope. I went up to my room, and there beheld two noble five-franc pieces, whose presence seemed to me inexplicable. I went to sleep endeavoring to remember my expenditures and account for this unlooked-for treasure. The next day Pauline came to me as I was preparing to go out to hire the box at the theatre.

"'Perhaps ten francs is not enough,' she said, blushing; 'my mother has sent me up with this. Take it, take it.' She laid fifteen francs on my table and tried to run away, but I prevented her. Admiration dried the tears that came to my eyes.

"'Pauline,' I said, 'you are indeed an angel. This loan is less precious to me than the modesty of feeling with which you offer it. I have desired a rich and elegant and titled wife; alas, at this moment I wish I had millions that I might marry a young girl like you, poor in money and rich in heart, and renounce the fatal passion which will kill me; in that prediction you may be right.'

"'Enough, enough!' she cried, as she ran away, and I heard her bird-like voice with its pretty trills echoing up the staircase. 'She is happy, indeed, not to love,' I thought, remembering the tortures I had suffered for the last few months. Pauline's fifteen francs proved

very valuable to me. Fedora, dreading the emanations of the great unwashed at the theatre to which we were going, regretted that she had brought no bouquet; I got her some flowers, and gave her therewith my life and fortune. I felt both remorse and pleasure in giving her a bouquet whose price revealed to me the cost of superficial gallantry in the world of fashion. Presently, however, she complained of the rather strong odor of a Mexican jasmine; then she felt a violent disgust at the vulgar theatre, and the hard seats; she reproached me for bringing her there; although I was beside her, she wished to leave, and did leave. To have endured sleepless nights, to have spent two months' means of living and yet not to have pleased her! Never did she seem, evil genius that she was, more gracious or more unfeeling. As we returned to the house seated together in a narrow coupé, I felt her breath, I touched her perfumed glove, I saw distinctly the treasures of her beauty, I inhaled the sweet fragrance of the iris,— all of woman and yet no woman at all. At that moment a ray of light helped me to look into the depths of that mysterious life. I suddenly remembered a book recently published by a poet, a true artistic conception thrown into the figure of Polyclès. I fancied I saw the monster, sometimes as an officer conquering a fiery horse, sometimes as a young girl at her toilet who drives a lover to despair, or again as a lover who breaks the heart of some good and modest virgin. Finding no other way to prevail with Fedora, I told her the fantastic tale; but not a glimmer of her resemblance to this weird poetry crossed her mind; she laughed at it heartily, like a child at the Arabian Nights.

"When I left her and returned home, I told myself that since Fedora resisted the love of a man of my age and the contagious warmth of a soul that sought communion with hers, there must be some mystery that withheld her. Perhaps, like Lady Delacour, she was the victim of cancer. Her life was assuredly all artificial. The very thought chilled me. Then I formed a plan at once the most matter-of-fact and the most insensate that lover ever dreamed of. To examine Fedora personally, just as I had now studied her intellectually, I resolved to pass a night, unknown to her, in her chamber. This is how I accomplished the enterprise, the thought of which consumed my soul as a desire of vengeance eats the heart of a Corsican monk. On her reception days Fedora received so large a number of guests that no particular notice was taken of how they came in or went out. Certain of being able to remain in the house without causing scandal, I awaited the next reception evening with impatience. As I dressed myself I put a little penknife into my pocket in default of a stiletto. If found upon me, that innocent literary implement could afford no ground for suspicion, and not knowing where my romantic resolution might lead me, I wished to go armed. When the salons began to fill I went into the bedroom to examine it carefully, and found to my joy that the outside shutters and blinds were carefully closed. Then I detached the heavy curtains from their loopings and drew them across the window; I risked much in making these preparations, but I had coldly calculated and accepted all dangers. Toward midnight, I hid behind a curtain in the embrasure of a window, trusting that neither my cramped position nor an unexpected

cough or sneeze would betray me. The white silk and muslin of the curtains fell before me in broad folds like the pipes of an organ, and in them I cut tiny loopholes with my penknife so as to see clearly. I heard the sounds in the salon, the laughter of the guests, and the rising and falling of their voices. Presently a few men came to take their hats, which were placed on a bureau near to where I stood. As they brushed the curtains I trembled, fearing that in their haste to get away they might look for their hats behind the curtain. The fact that no such misfortune occurred, made me augur well for my enterprise.

"Only about five or six intimate friends now remained with the countess, and these she invited to take tea in the Gothic boudoir adjoining the bedroom. The calumnies and evil-speaking for which society reserves the little belief that remains to it were now mingled with epigrams and witty opinions, and the rattle of cups and spoons. Rastignac in particular excited bursts of laughter by his cutting speeches. 'Monsieur de Rastignac,' said Fedora, laughing, 'is a man with whom it is dangerous to quarrel.' 'That's very true,' he answered, candidly; 'I have always been right in my hatreds — and in my friendships,' he added. 'My enemies serve me as well, perhaps, as my friends. I have made a special study of modern jargons and the natural artifices which people employ for attack and defence both. The eloquence of statesmen is perfected by social training. Have you a friend without any mind? talk about his uprightness and candor. Is the book of that other man intolerably dull? call it a conscientious labor; if ill-written, praise its ideas. Another man is faithless,

without constancy and fails you at every turn; bah! he is seductive, winning, charming. As for your enemies, you can bring both the dead and living against them; you reverse the whole order of your remarks; and you are quite as perceptive of their defects as you were of the virtues of your friends. This application of an opera-glass to the moral eye is the secret of conversation and the whole art of a courtier. Not to use it is to fight, unarmed, adversaries who are cased in iron like knights-banneret. I use it. I may abuse it sometimes. But I am respected,— I and my friends; and it is well known that my sword is as good as my tongue.'

"One of Fedora's most fervent admirers, a young man whose impertinence was actually celebrated, for he made it an element in his success, picked up the glove which Rastignac so contemptuously threw down. He spoke among other things of me, and praised my talents and personal qualities immensely. Rastignac had forgotten that form of malicious attack. The sardonic praise deceived Fedora, who immolated me without pity; to amuse her friends she told my secrets, my desires, and my hopes. 'He has a career before him,' said Rastignac. 'Perhaps some day he will prove to be a man able to take a cruel revenge; his talents are equal to his courage, and I think people are very foolish to attack him; he has a memory —'

"' — and writes memoirs,' said the countess.

"'Memoirs of a false countess, madame,' said Rastignac. 'To write them he needs another sort of courage.'

"I think he has a great deal of courage,' she replied; 'he is faithful to me.'

"A mad temptation possessed me to appear suddenly before them, like Banquo's ghost in Macbeth. I had lost a mistress, but I had gained a friend. But again love breathed into my mind one of those cowardly, subtile paradoxes with which we love to cheat our pain. If Fedora loves me, I thought, surely she is right to conceal her affection with a merry jest. Soon my impertinent rival, the last remaining guest, rose to leave her. 'What, going already?' she said, in the persuasive tone I knew so well, and which made me quiver. 'You will not give me another moment? you cannot sacrifice any of your pleasures to me?' He went away. 'Ah!' she exclaimed, yawning, 'how tiresome they all are!' then she pulled a bellrope violently, and the sound of the bell rang through the apartment.

"The countess entered her bedroom humming a passage in the *Pria che spunti*. No one had ever heard her sing, and the fact had given rise to certain odd conjectures. It was said that she had promised her first lover, who adored her talent and was jealous of her in his grave, to let no one enjoy a pleasure that once was his alone. I stretched every faculty of my being to catch the sounds. Note by note the voice rose higher; Fedora grew animated, the qualities of her throat developed, and the melody became almost a thing divine. A lucid clearness, a truth of tone and something harmonious and vibrant which penetrated, stirred, and excited the heart, was in this carefully concealed organ. Musicians are nearly always love-inspired. She who was singing thus must surely know how to love. The beauty of her voice was one mystery the more in this mysterious woman. I saw her then as

I now see you; she seemed listening to herself and drinking in a sensuous delight that came from her own being; it was as though she felt the joys of love.

"She stood before the fireplace when she ended the rondo; but as the sounds died away her face changed, the features lost their composure and expressed weariness and fatigue. The mask had fallen; actress that she was, the play was over. And yet the sort of blight imprinted on her beauty by the cessation of the part she played, or by the lassitude of this particular evening, was not without its charm. Here is the true woman at last, I thought. Standing before the fire she placed her foot, as though to warm it, on the fender, took off her gloves, unfastened her bracelets, and drew a gold chain on which a jewelled smelling-bottle was hung, over her head. I felt an indescribable pleasure in watching her graceful movements, like those of a cat as she washes and combs her fur in the sunshine. She gazed into the mirror before her, and said aloud in a tone of ill-humor: 'I did not look well to-night, my complexion is fading frightfully. I ought to give up this life of dissipation and go to bed earlier — Where can Justine be?' She rang again, and her maid came hastily into the room. Where did the woman keep herself? She came by a secret door. My imagination had long suspected this invisible servant, a tall, dark, well-made girl. 'Did Madame ring?' she asked. 'Twice,' replied Fedora; 'are you going to pretend deafness?' 'I was making Madame's almond milk.' Justine knelt down, untied her mistress's sandals and removed the shoes, while Fedora lay carelessly back in an armchair beside the fire, yawning and passing her fingers through her hair. All was natural and easy

in her movements, and nothing revealed any secret cause of suffering, such as I had suspected.

"'George is in love,' she said suddenly. 'I shall dismiss him: he has drawn the curtains again to-night. What is he thinking of?' The blood flowed to my heart at the remark, but it was not long a question of curtains.

"'Life is very empty,' said the countess. 'Ah, take care! don't scratch me as you did yesterday. Look,' showing a little polished knee, 'I bear the marks of it yet.' She put her naked feet into velvet slippers edged with swansdown, and unfastened her dress, while Justine made ready to brush her hair.

"'You ought to marry, madame, and have children,' said the maid. 'Children! they would put an end to me at once,' cried Fedora. 'A husband! Where is the man to whom I could — Was my hair becomingly arranged to-night?' — 'No, not entirely.' — 'What a fool you are.' — 'Nothing suits you less than to crêpe your hair,' replied Justine; 'thick, smooth curls are far more becoming to you.' — 'You think so?' — 'Why, yes, madame; fluffy, crêped hair is only suited to blondes" — "Marry? no, no! Marriage is a traffic for which I was not born.'

"What a terrible scene for a lover. This solitary woman, without relations or friends, atheist in love, unbelieving of sentiment, without the need, so natural to all human beings, of heart intercourse, and yet through some feeble sense of it reduced to talk with her waiting-woman in vapid, empty phrases — ah! I pitied her. Justine unlaced her. I watched her with curiosity as the last veil was removed. The sight dazzled me; through the linen of her chemise, and by

the light of the wax candles, her white and rosy flesh shone like a silver statue beneath a wrapping of gauze. No, there was no imperfection to make her dread the eyes of love. The mistress seated herself before the fire, silent and thoughtful, while the maid lit the taper in the alabaster lamp suspended near the bed. Justine went to fetch a warming-pan, and prepared the bed; then, after long and minute services which revealed the countess's deep veneration for her own person, she assisted her mistress into bed, and soon after left the room.

"The countess turned several times; she was evidently agitated; she sighed, — a slight sound escaped her lips, and was perceptible to my ear, indicating impatience; then she stretched her hand toward the table, took a vial containing a brown liquid, and poured a few drops into her milk before she drank it. At length, after a few distressful sighs, she cried out, 'My God!' The exclamation, and above all, the accent with which she uttered it, broke my heart. Little by little she ceased to move. I was frightened, but presently I heard the steady regular breathing of a person asleep. Then I parted the rustling silk curtains, left my position and went to the foot of the bed, where I stood looking at her with indefinable feelings. She was exquisite as she lay there. One arm was thrown above her head like a child; her soft and tranquil face surrounded by laces, expressed a sweetness that impassioned me. Presuming too much upon my own strength, I had not expected the tortures I now endured, — to be so near and yet so far from her! 'My God!' that shred of an unknown thought, which was

all the light I was destined to carry away with me, had suddenly changed my ideas about Fedora. The cry, full of deepest meaning, or signifying nothing, hollow or replete with real things, might express either happiness or suffering, a pain of the body or a sorrow of mind. Was it imprecation or prayer; memory or hope; regret or fear? A lifetime was in those words, — a life of indigence, or of wealth, possibly of crime. The enigma hidden beneath that beautiful semblance of a woman returned to mind; Fedora might be explained in so many ways that she became inexplicable. The capricious breath which came through her teeth, sometimes faintly, sometimes rhythmically, solemnly or gayly, seemed a sort of language to which thoughts and feelings might be attached. I hoped to surprise her secrets by penetrating her sleep; I dreamed her dreams, I floated in a thousand directions, with conflicting thoughts and many judgments. Looking at that exquisite face, so calm and pure, it was impossible to believe that the woman had no heart. I resolved on a last effort. I would tell her my life, my love, my sacrifices; perhaps I should thus awake her pity, and win a tear from eyes that never wept. I was thus placing my hopes once more on a final attempt to win her, when the noises in the street warned me that day was breaking. For a moment the thought came to me, of Fedora waking in my arms; it tyrannized cruelly over me, but I wished to resist it, and I fled from the room, taking no precautions to avoid a noise. Fortunately, I found a door which opened on a little staircase; the key was in the lock; I closed it violently after me, and without knowing or caring whether I

were seen, I sprang down to the street in a few bounds.

"Two days later an author was to read a comedy to a party of guests in the countess's salon. I went with the intention of remaining to the last and proffering a rather singular request. I wished her to give me the whole of the next evening, and to close her doors so that we might be wholly alone. But when the company had left and I found myself alone with her, my heart failed me. The very ticking of the clock terrified me. It was a quarter to twelve. 'If I do not speak,' I thought, 'then I had better break my skull against the corner of the chimney-piece.' I allowed myself three minutes' respite: the three minutes went by; I did not break my skull against the marble; my heart had grown heavy, like a sponge as it fills with water.

"'How lively you are,' she said to me. 'Ah, madame,' I answered, 'if only you could understand me!' — 'Why, what is the matter?' she replied; 'you are quite pale.' — 'I hesitate to ask a favor of you.' She made an encouraging gesture, and I asked for the interview. 'Willingly,' she said; 'but why not speak to me now?' — 'I will not deceive you,' I said; 'I want to pass the whole evening with you, as though we were brother and sister. Do not fear; I know your antipathies; you understand me well enough to feel sure I will ask nothing that shall displease you, — besides, a bold man would never do as I am doing. You have offered me friendship, you are kind, and full of indulgence — well, to-morrow I intend to bid you farewell. Don't retract!' I cried, for I saw she was about to speak; then I rapidly left the room.

"It was in May last, about eight o'clock in the evening, that Fedora received me alone in her Gothic boudoir. I did not tremble then, I felt sure of happiness; either my mistress should be mine, or I would escape into the arms of death. I saw and condemned the cowardice of my love. A man is strong when he admits to himself his weakness.

"Fedora was lying on a sofa with her feet on a cushion, dressed in blue cashmere. An Eastern beretta — the same that many painters give to the early Jews — added a strange piquancy to her attractions. The fugitive charm which now attached to her whole person seems to prove that we are at times new beings, apart from our previous selves, with no likeness to the I of the past, or the I of the future. I had never seen her so glorious.

"'Do you know,' she said, laughing, 'that you have piqued my curiosity?'

"'I will not betray it,' I answered coldly, sitting down beside her, and taking a hand which she resigned to me. 'You sing delightfully.'

"'You have never heard me!' she cried, with a gesture of surprise.

"'I will prove to you that I have, if necessary. Is that delightful voice of yours another mystery? Don't be uneasy; I will not try to penetrate it.'

"We talked together familiarly for more than an hour. Though I took the tone and manner and gestures of a man to whom Fedora could refuse nothing, I treated her with lover-like respect. She granted me the favor of kissing her hand, which she ungloved with dainty motions; I was so wrapped in the illusion in

which I struggled to believe, that my soul seemed to melt and pour itself into that kiss. Fedora allowed me to caress and fondle her with surprising willingness. But do not think me a fool; had I gone one step beyond these brotherly endearments, I should have felt the claws of the cat. For more than ten minutes we remained silent. I looked at her with admiration; lending her the charms to which in truth she gave the lie. At that moment she was mine, mine alone; I possessed her intuitively; I enveloped her with my desire, I held her, clasped her, wedded her in imagination. I vanquished Fedora by the power of a magnetic fascination; and I have always regretted that I did not then bring her wholly under subjection; but at that moment I sought, not the mere woman, but a soul, a life, an ideal and perfect happiness, the glorious dream in which we do not long believe.

"'Madame,' I said, feeling that the last hour of my intoxication had come, 'listen to me. I love you; you know it; I have told it to you in a thousand ways, and you ought to have understood me. I would not seek your love by the airs and graces of a dandy, nor with the flattery and importunity of fools like those who surround you, and therefore you have failed to comprehend me. How many woes have I not endured through you, though you were innocent of them! But you shall judge me now. There are two poverties in this world, madame, — one that goes boldly through the streets in rags, like another Diogenes, feeding on the barest necessaries, reducing existence to its simplest wants; a poverty that is perhaps happier than wealth, at any rate more careless, grasping the world at a point

where other men will have none of it. Then comes the other poverty, of luxury, — the hidalgo's poverty, pauperism behind a title, in a white waistcoat and yellow gloves, which drives in carriages and has not a penny to save a fortune. One is the poverty of the people, the other the poverty of swindlers, of kings, and men of talent. I am neither people nor king nor swindler, possibly not even a man of talent; call me an exception. My name requires me to die rather than beg — Do not fear, madame, I am rich enough to-day; I possess all that I need of earth.' I said this observing that her face assumed the cold expression with which people listen to the demands of a visitor asking money for a charity. 'Do you remember the day you went to the Gymnase without me, not expecting to see me there?' She made a sign of assent. 'I had spent my last penny to take you. Do you remember our walk in the Jardin des Plantes? the coach which I hired cost my whole substance.' Then I told her my sacrifices, I pictured my life, not as I am telling it to you now in the intoxication of wine, but in the noble intoxication of the heart. My passion overflowed in ardent language, in flashes of feeling, since forgotten and which neither art nor memory could ever reproduce. It was not the cold narration of a despised lover; my love, in all the strength and beauty of its hope, inspired the words which pleaded for life with the cry of a lacerated soul; my tones were those of the dying on a battle-field offering their last prayer —

"She wept. I stopped short. Good God! her tears came from the paltry emotion we buy at a theatre for a few francs; my success was that of a good actor!

"'If I had known,' she said.

"'Say no more,' I exclaimed; 'at this moment I love you enough to kill you—' She tried to seize the bell-rope. I laughed aloud. 'Call no one!' I cried; 'I will leave you to live out your days in peace. It would be a paltry form of hatred to kill you. Fear nothing, I have passed a whole night standing at the foot of your bed—'

"'Monsieur!' she said, blushing; but after that first impulse of the modesty which all women possess, even the most callous, she threw a contemptuous glance upon me and said, 'You must have found it very cold.'

"'Do you think, madame, that your beauty is so precious to me?' I answered, guessing the thoughts that moved her. 'Your face is to me the promise of a soul more beautiful than your personal beauty. Ah, madame, the men who only see a woman in womanhood can buy odalisques worthy of the sultan's harem, and be happy at a low price. But I have been ambitious; I wanted to live heart to heart with you who have no heart,—I know it now. If ever you belong to a man I will kill him. But no, you might love him, and his death would grieve you— Oh, how I suffer!' I cried.

"'If a promise can console you,' she said, laughing, 'I can assure you that I shall belong to no man.'

"'Then,' I said, interrupting her, 'you insult God, and you will be punished. Some day, lying on that sofa, unable to bear either light or noise, condemned to live as it were in a tomb, you will suffer untold agony. When you seek the reason of your slow, relent-

less pains remember the sufferings you have so lavishly dealt out to others. You have sown curses, and they will return to you in hatred. We who have suffered are the true judges, the executioners of a justice which governs here below, trampling underfoot that of men, but lower than that of God.'

"'Ah!' she said, laughing, 'I am guilty indeed for not loving you! Is it my fault? No, I do not love you; you are a man, and that is enough for me. I am happy in being alone; why should I change my life — call it selfish if you will — for the caprices of a master? Marriage is a sacrament, in virtue of which we obtain nothing but a communion of sorrows. Besides, children annoy me. Did I not loyally warn you of my nature? Why are you not content with my friendship? I would gladly soothe the suffering I have unwittingly caused you by not guessing the cost to you of your poor little francs; I appreciate your sacrifices; but only love can pay for such devotion, such delicate attentions, and I love you so little that this scene affects me disagreeably.'

"'I feel how ridiculous I have made myself, forgive me,' I said gently; 'I love you enough to listen with delight to the cruel words you are saying to me. Oh, would that I could write my love in my heart's blood.'

"'All men use those classic phrases on such occasions,' she said, still laughing. 'But it seems to be rather difficult to die at a woman's feet, for I meet the dead men everywhere. It is midnight; allow me to retire.'

"'And in two hours you will exclaim, as you did the night before last, "*My God!*"' I said to her.

"'Night before last!' she cried. 'True, I was thinking of my broker; I had forgotten to tell him to sell out certain stocks, and in the course of the day they had gone down.'

"I looked at her with eyes that flashed with rage. Ah! sometimes a crime may be a poem, — I felt it. Familiar with such passionate adjurations, she had already forgotten my words and prayers.

"'Shall you marry a peer of France?' I asked coldly.

"'Perhaps; if he is a duke.'

"I took my hat and bowed to her.

"'Permit me to accompany you to my outer door,' she said, with piercing satire in her tone and gestures and in the attitude of her head.

"'Madame!'

"'Monsieur?'

"'Never will I see you again.'

"'I hope not,' she answered, bowing her head with an insolent expression.

"'You wish to be a duchess,' I resumed, driven onward by a sort of frenzy which her gesture roused in my heart. 'You crave titles and honors. Well then, let me love you; tell my pen to speak, my voice to sound for you alone; be the mainspring of my life, my star! and take me for a husband when I am minister and peer of France and duke. I can be all, all, if you but will it.'

"'You certainly employed your time well in a lawyer's office,' she said, smiling; 'your plea has plenty of ardor.'

"'To you the present,' I cried, 'to me the future. I lose a woman, you lose fame and a family. Time is

big with vengeance; it will bring you loss of beauty and a solitary death, but to me glory!'

"'Thank you for that finale!' she said, smothering a yawn, and showing by her attitude the desire that I should leave her sight.

"The words silenced me. I threw my hatred in one look upon her and fled the house.

"What was now before me? Either I must forget Fedora, cure my madness, return to my studious solitude, or die. I compelled myself to toil; I resolved to finish the works in my brain. For fifteen days I never left my room, and spent both days and nights in study. In spite of my courage and the inspirations of despair, I worked with difficulty and by fits and starts. The muse had fled. I could not drive away the brilliant and mocking phantom of Fedora. Behind each thought of my mind lurked another sickly thought, a gnawing desire, terrible as remorse. I imitated the anchorites of the Thebaid. If I did not pray like them, like them I lived in a desert. I delved into my soul, as they among the rocks; and I would gladly have worn spikes about my loins, piercing the flesh with every point, could I have conquered my mental anguish by physical pain.

"One evening Pauline came into my room. 'You are killing yourself!' she said; 'you ought to go out and see your friends.'

"'Ah, Pauline, your prediction is coming true! Fedora kills me; I wish to die. I cannot bear my life any longer.'

"'Is there but one woman in the world?' she said, smiling. 'Why do you put such infinite troubles into this short life?'

"I looked at her stupidly. She left me; I did not even notice that she did so. I had heard her voice without understanding the meaning of her words. Before long I was obliged to leave the house to carry the manuscript of the memoirs to my literary employer. Sunken in my own thoughts, I did not perceive how it was that I lived without money. I was only conscious that the four hundred and fifty francs now due me would suffice to pay my debts. I went to get them, and met Rastignac, who thought me changed and emaciated. 'What hospital are you just out of?' he cried.

"'That woman is killing me!' I answered. 'I can neither despise her nor forget her.'

"'Better kill her!' he answered, laughing; 'and then perhaps you won't think of her again.'

"'I have thought of it,' I said. 'But though at times I comfort my soul with the thought of crime, I know I am unable to commit it. Fedora is a glorious monster, who would pray for mercy, and I am no Othello.'

"'She is like every other woman whom we cannot get,' said Rastignac, interrupting me.

"'I am mad!' I cried; 'sometimes I feel the madness surging in my brain. My thoughts are like phantoms; they dance about me, but I cannot seize them. I prefer death to such a life as this. I seek a way — the best way — to end the struggle. It is no longer a question of the actual, living, breathing Fedora, the Fedora of the faubourg Saint-Honoré, but of my Fedora, of her who is there,' I cried, striking my brow. 'What think you of opium?' — 'Bah! horrid suffering!' an-

swered Rastignac. — 'Charcoal?' — 'Vulgar!' — 'The Seine?' — 'Those slabs at the Morgue are filthy.' — 'A pistol-shot?' — 'If it misses, you 're disfigured for life. Listen to me,' he continued; 'like all other young men, I have reflected about suicide. Which of us has not killed himself two or three times before he was thirty? I see no better way than to use up life by excesses. Plunge into the deepest dissipation, and either you or your passion will perish. Intemperance, my dear fellow, is the king of deaths; does n't it command apoplexy, and is n't apoplexy a pistol-shot that never misses? The orgies of physical enjoyment are the small change of opium. Excesses that force us to drink madly are a mortal challenge to life. The Duke of Clarence's butt of malmsey tastes better than Seine mud. Each time we go under the table is n't it the same as charcoal in little doses, — a slow suffocation? If the watchman picks us up in the street and lays us on the cold beds at the guard-house, don't we enjoy all the pleasures of the Morgue, minus the swollen stomachs, — blue, green, and every color, — and plus a knowledge of the crisis? Ah,' he cried, 'my kind of suicide is n't the vulgar death of a bankrupt grocer! Such men have brought the river into disrepute; they fling themselves into it to touch the hearts of their creditors. In your place, I should try to die with elegance. If you want to create a new style of death by fighting this sort of duel with life, I 'll go into it with you. I am annoyed and disappointed. That Alsatian I was to marry has six toes on her left foot. I could n't live with a woman who has a foot with six toes; people would find it out, and I should be ridiculous. Besides,

it seems she has only eighteen thousand francs a year, — the fortune diminishes and the toes increase; the devil take them! Let us lead this wild life, and happiness may come by the way.'

"Rastignac's vehemence carried me off my feet. The plan had too many seductions; it awakened too many hopes. The coloring of the picture was too poetic not to fascinate a poet.

"'But the money?' I said.

"'Have n't you got that four hundred and fifty francs?'

"'Yes; but I owe them to my tailor and to my landlady.'

"'Pay your tailor? You 'll never be anything in this world, — not even a minister.'

"'But what could we do with such a beggarly sum?'

"'Play it,' he answered. I shuddered. 'Ah,' he added, observing my reluctance. 'You say you are willing to plunge into what I call the *Dissipational System*, and yet you are afraid of a green table-cloth!'

"'Hear me,' I said; 'I promised my father never to set foot in a gambling-house. That promise is not only sacred to me, but I have myself an invincible horror of such places. Take my money and go alone. While you are playing it I will put my affairs in order and then go to your rooms and wait for you.'

"That, my dear Émile, is the tale of my ruin. Let a young man meet with a woman who does not love him, or a woman who loves him too well and his life is forever spoiled. Happiness exhausts our vigor, un-

happiness engulfs our virtue. I re-entered the Hôtel Saint-Quentin, and gazed round the attic-room where I had lived the chaste life of a scholar, — a life that might perhaps have been long and honorable, and which I ought never to have quitted for the passionate existence which had dragged me down to the abyss. Pauline found me in an attitude of despair.

"'What is the matter?' she asked.

"I rose quietly and counted out the money which I owed to her mother, adding the rent of my room for the coming six months. She watched me in terror. 'I am going to leave you, dear Pauline.' 'I thought so,' she cried. 'Hear me, my child, I do not say that I shall not return; keep my cell ready for six months; if I am not back by the 15th of November you are to inherit all. This sealed manuscript,' I continued, showing her a package, 'is a copy of my great work on the Will which you are to deposit in the Bibliothèque du Roi. As to all else you are to do what you like with it.'

"She gave me a look which weighed heavily on my heart. Pauline stood there as my living conscience.

"'Shall I have no more lessons?' she said, pointing to the piano. I did not answer.

"'Will you write to me?'

"'Adieu, Pauline.' I drew her gently to me; then on that brow of love, pure as the snow before it touches earth, I laid the kiss of a brother, of an old man. She left me quickly. I did not wish to see Madame Gaudin. I put my key in its usual place and went away. As I passed through the rue de Cluny I heard the light step of a woman behind me.

"'I have worked you this purse; surely you will not refuse it?' said Pauline. By the dim light of a street lantern I saw a tear in her eye, and I sighed. Driven perhaps by the same thought we hastened to separate, like persons fleeing from the plague.

"The life of dissipation to which I now devoted myself was curiously represented by the room where I awaited Rastignac's return with stern indifference. On the centre of the mantle-shelf stood a clock surmounted by a Venus sitting on a tortoise, in the angle of whose arm was a half-smoked cigar. Elegant pieces of furniture, love-gifts no doubt, stood here and there. Shabby slippers were tossed upon a silken sofa. The comfortable arm-chair in which I sat bore as many scars as an old soldier; it held out its ragged arms, and exhibited on its back the incrusted pomades and hair-oils of the heads of friends. Opulence and poverty were bluntly mated on the bed, on the walls, everywhere. You might have thought it a Neapolitan palace inhabited by lazzaroni. It was in fact the room of a gambler or a reprobate, whose luxury is all personal, who lives by sensations and cares nothing for the decency and fitness of things. The picture is not without its artistic side. Life leaps up in these tawdry rags and spangles, unexpected, incomplete as it is in reality, but electrifying, fantastic, eager, as in a halt where the marauder pillages all he wants. A volume of Byron, with half its pages torn out, served to light the few fagots of the young man who risks a thousand francs at play and has not the wherewithal to pay for a log of wood, who drives his tilbury, but does not own a decent shirt. Tomorrow, perhaps, a countess, or an actress, or

a lucky game of écarté, will give him the wardrobe of a king. Here a wax-candle is stuck in a tin match-box; there lies the portrait of some woman deprived of its chased gold frame. How can a young man eager for emotions renounce the delights of a life so rich in contrasts, and which gives him the pleasures of war in times of peace? I was well-nigh asleep when Rastignac kicked open the door and rushed in, crying, —

"'Victory! we can die at our ease!'

"He showed me his hat full of gold, which he placed on the table, and we danced round it like two cannibals with a prey to be eaten, — howling, stamping, skipping, striking blows at each other with our fists that would have staggered a rhinoceros, and singing praises to the pleasures of the world held for us within the compass of that hat.

"'Twenty-seven thousand francs!' cried Rastignac, adding some bank-bills to the heap of gold; 'for most people that is enough to live on, but will it suffice to kill you and me?'

"'Yes, yes, we will die in a bath of gold. Hurrah!' and we capered again.

"We divided our gains, like heirs-at-law, coin by coin, beginning with the double napoleons, and coming down by degrees to the lesser pieces, spinning out our joy as we cried alternately, 'Yours!' 'Mine!' 'Mine!' 'Yours!'

"'We shall never be able to sleep,' cried Rastignac. 'Joseph, get us some punch.' He flung a heap of gold to his faithful servant. 'Here's your share,' he said; 'bury yourself if you want to.'

"The next day I bought furniture from Lesage and hired the apartment where you knew me last, in the rue Taitbout, and got the best upholsterer in Paris to

decorate it. I purchased horses; I flung myself into a whirlpool of pleasures that were hollow and real both. I gambled, I won and lost enormous sums, but always in private houses, — never in gambling-dens, for which I still retained my early and pious horror. Little by little I made acquaintances. I owed their intimacy to quarrels or to that facile confidence with which we betray our secrets in degrading company; it is, perhaps, by their vices that men hang best together. I circulated a few literary compositions which gained me credit. The great men of commercial literature, seeing that I was not a rival to be feared, praised me, — less, no doubt, for my personal merits than to annoy their own class. I became a *viveur* (to employ the picturesque word we have invented for our excesses); I made it a matter of pride to kill myself quickly, to surpass my gayest companions in ardor and vigor. I was always fresh and elegant; I passed for being witty. Nothing about me betrayed the awful existence which makes a man a funnel, a digesting apparatus, a *cheval de luxe.*

"But soon Excess appeared before me in all the majesty of its horror; I comprehended it. Surely the prudent and orderly men who ticket the bottles in their cellars and leave them to their heirs have no conception of the theory of this broad life, nor of its normal condition. Can you teach the poetry of it to provincials, to whom tea and opium, so prodigal of delights, are only two medicines? Even in Paris, the capital of thought, we find crude sybarites, men unable to sustain an excess of pleasure, who return home wearied from a banquet, like those good shopkeepers who sit up to hear an opera of Rossini and complain of the music. They renounce

the life at once, just as the sober man declines to eat a second Ruffec patty because the first gave him an indigestion. Excess is certainly an art like that of poetry, and needs strong natures. Before a man can grasp its mysteries, or taste its beauties he must, to some extent, study it conscientiously. Like all sciences, it is in the beginning repellant and prickly. Immense obstacles surround the high pleasures of man, — not his lesser enjoyment of details, but the broad system which trains into a habit his choicest sensations, gathers them up, fructifies them into a dramatic life within his life, and thus necessitates a vast and hurried dissipation of his forces. War, Power, Art are corruptions within human reach as powerful as Excess, and all are difficult of approach. But once a man has mounted the breach of these great mysteries, has he not reached another world? Generals, statesmen, artists are all, more or less, driven to excesses, by the need of giving violent emotions to natures so far out of the common as theirs. After all, war is an Excess of slaughter, just as politics are a debauch of selfish interests. All excesses are related. These social monsters have the alluring power of abysses; they draw us to them as Saint Helena beckoned Napoleon from afar; they induce vertigos, they fascinate, and we seek to see to their depths, we know not why. The secret of the infinite may be below that precipice; perhaps in that abyss there is some flattering discovery for man; is he not interested first and always in his own being? In contrast with the paradise of his studious hour, and the bliss of his faculties of conception, the weary artist seeks, like God, a seventh-day's rest, or, like the Devil, the joys of hell, to balance the

labor of the mind with the labor of the senses. The relaxation of Lord Byron could never be the chattering whist which delights the small capitalist; poet, he wanted Greece to play against a Sultan. In war, man becomes an exterminating angel, a species of executioner, gigantic in purpose. Surely, some extraordinary spell must be upon us before we seek these awful emotions, these destroyers of our frail bodies, which surround our passions like a thorny hedge. The smoker writhes convulsively and suffers agony for the abuse of tobacco, but it has led him into regions of delightful holiday? Has Europe ever wiped her feet of the blood of war before she stepped into it again? Have masses of men their times of drunkenness as nature herself the crises of love? To the private individual, the Mirabeau who vegetates in times of peace but dreams of whirlwinds, Excess means much; it means a grasp on life, a duel with an unknown power, with a dragon. The monster is at first abhorrent, terrifying; you must seize him by the horns, and the fatigue is dreadful; nature may have given you a slow and narrow stomach; you conquer it, you enlarge it; you learn how to take your wine, you grow friendly with intoxication, you pass nights without sleep, and soon you have the temperament of a colonel of cuirassiers; you have created yourself anew.

"When a man has thus metamorphosed himself, when the neophyte, grown to be an old soldier, has trained his soul to the artillery and his legs to the march, without as yet falling a victim to the dragon (though he knows not which of the two is master), they struggle and roll together, alternately vanquished and vanquishing, in a sphere where all is mystical, where the suf-

ferings of the soul are put to sleep, and nothing lives but the ghosts of ideas. The awful struggle has now become a necessity. Like the fabulous personages of many legends, who sell their soul to the Devil to obtain the power of doing evil, the dissipated man has played his death against the joys of life, — those fruitful and abounding joys! Existence, instead of flowing onward between its peaceful and monotonous banks, behind a counter or in an office, boils and foams and rushes like a torrent. Excess is to the body what mystical pleasures are to the soul. Intoxication plunges the mind into dreams whose phantasmagoria are as curious as those of ecstasy; it bestows hours of enchantment equal to the fancies of a young girl, delightful conversations with friends, words that reveal a lifetime, joys that are frank and without reservation, journeys without fatigue, poems evolving in a sentence.

"The brutal gratification of the beast, to the depths of which science descends to seek a soul, is succeeded by enchanting torpors for which men sigh when worn and wearied out by intellect. They feel the need of absolute repose. Excess to them is the tax which genius pays to evil. Observe the world's great men; if they pursue no pleasure to excess, nature has created them weaklings. Some power, be it a jeering or a jealous power, vitiates their soul or their body and neutralizes the efforts of their genius. During these bacchanal hours men and things appear before us clothed with the livery of our own estate. Kings of creation, we transform created things at will. Athwart this perpetual delirium Play pours its molten lead into

our veins. The day comes when we belong to the monster; we have then a desperate awaking; impotence is seated at our bedside; aged warriors, consumption is waiting to devour us; statesmen, death hangs by the thread of an aneurism in our heart; for myself, as I well know, my lungs will say to me, as once they said to Raphael Urbino, killed by excess of love, 'Thy time has come, depart.'

"That is my life. I came too early or too late into the world; perhaps my powers might have been dangerous had I not thus enfeebled them. The universe was saved from Alexander by the cup of Hercules at the close of an orgy. There are souls betrayed who must have heaven or hell — the feasts of Bacchus or the Hospice of Saint-Bernard. To-night I had no heart to rebuke these creatures," he went on, pointing to Euphrasia and Aquilina. "Are they not the embodiment of my own history, the image of my life? Could I accuse them? no, for they seem to me my judges.

"In the course of this living poem, in the midst of this bewildering malady, I came to two crises that were fruitful of bitter pains. A few nights after I had flung myself like Sardanapalus on my pyre, I met Fedora in the portico of the opera-house. We were waiting for our carriages. 'Ah! so I meet you in the land of the living,' was the meaning of her smile and the theme of the low words she doubtless said to her companion as she related my story and judged my love by the commonplace standards of her own mind, congratulating herself perhaps for her mistaken perceptions. Oh, to be dying for her, to adore her still, to see but her in the midst of my excesses, and know myself the object of

her laughter! Would that I could rend my breast, tear out that fatal love, and fling it at her feet!

"Soon my money was exhausted; but three years' sobriety in a garret had brought me robust health, and when again I found myself without a penny it was still perfect. Continuing to pursue death, I signed bills of exchange for short dates, and the day of meeting them drew near. Dreadful emotions! and yet how young hearts live on them. I was not meant to grow palsied as yet; my soul was young and eager and fresh. My first debt called back my virtues, and they came with lagging feet as though disconsolate; but soon I compromised, as we do with some old aunt who begins by scolding us, and ends by giving money and tears. Imagination, sterner than virtue, showed me my name upon those bills travelling from place to place through Europe. 'Our name is ourself,' says Eusèbe Salverte. Those banking agents, the embodiment of commercial vengeance, dressed in gray, wearing the livery of their master and a silver shield, whom I had formerly looked at with indifference as they passed along the streets of Paris, I now hated by anticipation. Before long some one of them would surely come and ask me for payment of the eleven bills of exchange that I had signed. Those bills amounted to three thousand francs, and I had not a penny. I saw in my mind's eye the man, with a dull face indifferent to all despair, even that of death, standing before me like the executioner who says to the criminal, 'It is half-past three o'clock.' That man would have the right to seize me, to post my name, to soil it, to make jests upon it. DEBT! To owe money! can a man belong to himself if he owes to

other men? Might they not justly ask me to give account of my life? Why had I eaten puddings à la Chipolata, why did I drink iced wines, why did I sleep, walk, think, amuse myself without paying them? In the middle of a poem, in the grasp of an idea, surrounded by friends, by delights, by merriment, I might see a man in a brown coat, holding a shabby hat in his hand, approach me. That man was my Debt, my bill of exchange, a spectre that blighted my joy, forced me to leave the table to follow him, wrenched from me my gayety, my mistress, my all, even my bed.

"Remorse is more tolerant, it drives us neither to the streets nor to Sainte-Pélagie, — it spares us at least that execrable sink of vice, — it sends us only to the scaffold which ennobles us; for at the moment of our execution the whole community believes us innocent. But short of that, society allows no virtue to the spendthrift who can spend no more. I dreamed of those debts on two legs, dressed in green cloth, wearing blue spectacles and carrying faded umbrellas; those debts incarnate, which in some joyous moment we come face to face with at the corner of a street, — creatures who have the horrible right to say: 'That is Monsieur de Valentin; he owes me money and does not pay it; but I have a hold upon him.' We must bow to such creditors graciously. 'When will you pay me?' they reply. And then we lie or implore some other man for the money; we cringe before a fool sitting at a desk, accept his cold glance, the glance of a leech, more odious than a blow, and put up perforce with his sharp reckoning and his crass ignorance. A debt is a work of imagination that such men can never comprehend. An impulse of the

soul often impels and subjugates a borrower, while no great-heartedness subjugates, no generosity guides those who live in money and know nought else. I felt a hatred of money. Or again, the bill of exchange might be metamorphosed into an old man burdened with a family he was virtuously bringing up. Or perhaps I owed that money to some living Greuze, to a paralytic surrounded by children, to the widow of a soldier, all of whom held up to me their supplicating hands. Dreadful creditors, with whom we must needs weep, and even if we pay the debt, we still are bound to succor them.

"The evening before the day on which my first bill of exchange was to fall due, I had gone to bed with the stolid calmness of a criminal before his execution, or a man on the eve of a duel; such persons are still under the influence of deceitful hopes. But when I woke in the morning in cold blood, when I felt my soul in the grasp of a banker, classed on an inventory, written in red ink, then my debts sprang about me like grasshoppers; they were there on my clock, in my chairs, hanging to every article that I liked best to use. All those dear material servants were to fall a prey to the minions of the Châtelet; a bailiff would take them from me, and fling them brutally into the street. Ah! my remains still lived; I was not dead, I was still myself. The door-bell rang in my heart and echoed to my head. It was martyrdom without a heaven beyond it. Yes, to a generous man debt is hell, but hell amid brokers and bailiffs. An unpaid debt is a base thing; it is the beginning of knavery. Worse than that, it is a lie; it foretells crime, the stocks, the scaffold.

"My bills of exchange were protested. Three days later I paid them; and this was how I did it. A land speculator proposed that I should sell him the island I possessed in the Loire, which contained my mother's grave. I agreed. When signing the deeds before the purchaser's notary I felt a cold air as from a vault pass over me. I shuddered, remembering that the same chill dampness had seized me as I stood by my father's open grave. I accepted the incident as an evil omen. I fancied I heard my mother's voice and saw her shade; some power, I knew not what, sounded my own name vaguely in my ears amid the ringing of bells.

"The price of my island left me, when all my debts were paid, about two thousand francs. I might now have resumed the peaceful life of a scholar and returned to my garret-chamber after experimenting with the life of the world. I could have carried back to it a mind filled with vast observation, and a name that was already somewhat known. But FEDORA, — I was still her prey! We had often met. I made my name tingle in her ears by the praises her astonished lovers bestowed on my wit, my horses, my equipages, my success. She continued cold and insensible to everything, even to the remark, 'He is killing himself for you!' made to her by Rastignac. I called the whole world to aid my vengeance; but I was not happy. Deep as I had gone into the slime of the world, I had ever craved more deeply still the delights of mutual love; that phantom I still pursued through all the chances and changes and dissipations of my life, even to the depths of my excesses. Alas! I was deceived in every belief, I was punished for my benefactions by ingratitude, rewarded

for my wrong-doings by delights, — a baleful philosophy, but true of the man given over to Excess. Fedora had inoculated me with the leprosy of her vanity! Probing my soul, I found it gangrened, rotten. The devil had stamped his hoof upon my brow. I could no longer do without the continual excitements of my perilous life, or the hateful refinements of extravagance. Had I been rich as Crœsus, I should still have gambled and wasted my substance and rushed into vice. I dared not be alone with myself. I needed false friends, wine, courtesans, and good living to take my thoughts. The ties that bind a man to the sense of family were broken in me forever. The galley-slave of pleasure, I must now accomplish my destiny of suicide. During the last days of my last money I rushed nightly into incredible excesses, and each morning death flung me back to life. Like an annuitant, I might have walked through flames untouched. The day came when twenty francs were all that remained to me; and then for the first time a thought of Rastignac's great luck occurred to me, and I — Ha, ha!" — he suddenly bethought himself of the talisman, and pulled it from his pocket.

Whether it were that he was worn out by the struggles of this long day, and no longer had the strength to control his mind amid the fumes of wine and punch, or that, exasperated by the phantom of his life which he had thus conjured up, he had insensibly intoxicated himself by the torrent of his words, Raphael now grew wild and excited, like a man completely deprived of reason.

"To the devil with death!" he cried, brandishing the Skin. "I choose to live! I am rich! I have every

virtue! Nothing can thwart me! Who would not be good when he can be all? Ha, ha! I have wished for two hundred thousand francs a year, and I shall have them! Bow down before me, ye swine, who wallow on this carpet as if in a sty! You belong to me, fine property that you are! I can buy you all, — even that deputy that lies snoring over there! Come, you refuse of high society, make obeisance to me! I 'm your Pope!"

These violent exclamations, covered at first by the snores of those about him, were suddenly heard. Most of the sleepers woke up shouting; they saw the speaker standing unsteadily on his legs, and they cursed his noisy drunkenness with a concert of oaths.

"Silence!" cried Raphael. "Hounds, to your kennels! Émile, I tell you I have treasures; I 'll give you Havana cigars —"

"I hear you," replied the poet. "Fedora or death! Keep it up! That sugar-plum of a Fedora is only deceiving you. All women are daughters of Eve. Your tale is not a bit dramatic."

"You are asleep, you cheat!"

"No, no; Fedora or death! I 'm listening."

"Wake up!" cried Raphael, striking Émile with the Magic Skin as if he meant to draw forth an electric fluid.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Émile, rising and seizing Raphael in his arms. "My friend, recollect where you are, — in the company of bad women!"

"I 'm a millionnaire!"

"Millionnaire or not, you are drunk!"

"Drunk with power, — I can kill you. Silence! I am Nero! I am Nebuchadnezzar!"

"But, Raphael, hear me; we are in bad company. You ought to be silent out of dignity."

"My life has been silent too long. Now I will avenge myself on the universe! I'll not play at spending paltry money, — I'll imitate the epoch. I'll concentrate its teachings in myself by consuming human lives, and intellects, and souls. That's a luxury that is neither mean nor contemptible; it is the wealth, the opulence of the Plague! I will fight with fevers, — yellow, blue, and green, — with armies, with scaffolds. I can have Fedora — no, no, I do not want Fedora; she is my disease. I am dying of her. Let me forget Fedora — "

"If you continue to shout I'll carry you into the dining-room."

"Do you see that Skin? It is the last will and testament of Solomon. He's mine, that Solomon, — that little pedant of a king! Arabia is in the hollow of my hand, — Petræa too. The universe is mine. You are mine if I want you, — Ha! take care, lest I do want you. I can buy up your trumpery journal; I'll make you my valet. You can write verses and rule my paper for me. Valet! *valet*, — that means: He has health, because he thinks of nothing."

Here Émile dragged Raphael into the dining-room.

"Yes, yes, my dear friend," he said, "I'm your valet. But you are to be editor-in-chief of a newspaper, and you must hold your tongue. Be decent, if only out of regard for me. You do care for me, don't you?"

"Don't I! You shall smoke Havana cigars out of the Skin. The Skin, the Skin, my friend, the Sovereign Skin, — it's a panacea, it will cure corns! Have you corns? I'll extract them."

"Never did I see you so stupid."

"Stupid! No. That Skin is to shrink whenever I form a wish — it 's a living paradox. The brahman (for there 's a brahman behind it all) the brahman was a miserable joker because, don't you see, desires must stretch — "

"Yes, I see — "

"I tell you — "

"Yes, yes, that's very true, I think as you do, desires stretch — "

"I told you the Skin must stretch."

"Yes."

"You don't believe me; I see you don't; you 're as deceitful as that new king of ours."

"How am I to follow your drunken ramblings?"

"I bet I can prove it to you. Let's take its measure."

"Heavens! will he never go to sleep!" cried Émile, as Raphael began to hunt about the room for something.

Valentin, with the cleverness of a monkey, thanks to the curious lucidity of mind which occasionally contrasts in drunken men with their obtuseness of vision, soon found an inkstand and a napkin, repeating all the while, "Take the measure! Take the measure! Take the measure!"

"Yes," said Émile, "let us take the measure."

The two friends spread out the napkin, and laid the Magic Skin upon it. Émile, whose hand was steadier than Raphael's, took the pen and marked an ink line round the talisman, while his friend kept saying, "I wished for two hundred thousand francs a year, did n't

I? Well, when I get them, you will see that Skin shrink."

"Yes, but now go to sleep. Come and lie down on this sofa. There, are you comfortable?"

"Yes, my suckling of the Press. You shall amuse me, and brush off the flies. The friend of evil days has a right to be the friend of power, and I'll — give you — ci — gars — Hav —"

"Come, sleep off your gold, millionnaire."

"Sleep off your articles, you — Good-night. Say good-night to Nebuchadnezzar. Love! Your health! France — glory and riches — rich —"

Soon the two friends added their snores to the music that echoed in the adjoining rooms. The candles burned down one by one, shattered their glass cups and then went out. Night wrapped its black crape round the long orgy, to which Raphael's tale had been like an orgy of speech, of words without ideas, of ideas for which the right expression was often wanting.

About twelve o'clock of the next day the beautiful Aquilina rose, yawning and languid, with her cheek marbled by the imprint of the stamped velvet footstool on which her head had been lying. Euphrasia, wakened by the movement of her companion, jumped up suddenly, uttering a hoarse cry. Her pretty face, so fair, so fresh the night before, was yellow and pale, like that of a girl on her way to the hospital. One by one the guests began to stir and to groan as they felt the stiffness of their arms and legs, and the divers fatigues which overcame them on waking. A footman opened the blinds and windows of the salon. The company were presently upon their feet, called to life by the warm sunbeams which sparkled

upon their slumbering heads. The women, whose elegantly arranged hair was now dishevelled and whose dresses were disordered by the tossings of sleep, presented a hideous spectacle in the light of day. Their hair hung down, the expression of their faces had changed, their eyes so brilliant the night before were dulled by lassitude. The sallow complexions, often so dazzling by candlelight, were shocking to behold; the lymphatic faces, so fair and soft when at their best, had turned green; the lips, so deliciously rosy a few hours earlier, were now dry and pallid, and bore the shameful stigmata of drunkenness. The men recoiled from their mistresses of the night before when they saw them thus discolored and cadaverous, like flowers crushed in the street after the passage of a procession.

But the men who scorned the women were still more horrible to behold. You would have shuddered to see those human faces, those cavernous eyes which seemed unable to see, torpid with wine, stupid with the weariness of a cramped sleep more fatiguing than restorative. Each haggard face on which the physical appetites now lay bare to the eye, without the imaginary charm with which our souls endeavor to invest them, was unspeakably ferocious and coldly bestial. This awaking of Vice, naked and without disguises, this skeleton of Evil, in tatters, cold, empty, stripped of the sophistries of the mind or the fascinations of luxury, horrified the boldest of these athletes, habituated as they were to battle with Excess. Artists and courtesans kept silence as they gazed with haggard eyes at the disorder of the room where devastation reigned. A satanic laugh suddenly arose as Taillefer, hearing the smothered groaning

of his guests, endeavored to salute them with a grin; his bloated perspiring face seemed to hover over the scene like an infernal image of remorseless crime. The picture was complete, — the life of beasts in the midst of luxury, a horrible mixture of human pomps and wretchedness, the awakening from debauch when Excess with its strong hands has pressed the juice from the fruits of life and left nothing behind but the worthless refuse. You might have thought that Death was there smiling down upon a plague-smitten family; no more perfumes and dazzling lights, no gayety, no desires; only Disgust with its nauseous odors, its pungent philosophy, and with it all, the sun flaming out truth, an air pure as virtue, contrasting with the heated, fetid atmosphere, the miasmas of an orgy.

Several of these young girls, notwithstanding their depravity, were constrained to think on their waking of other days, when, pure and innocent, they looked from their windows embowered in honeysuckle, across the meadows where the lark was rising, and the rosy dawn illumined vaporously the fairy network of the dew. Others thought of the family breakfast, — the table around which parents and children laughed together, and the food was simple as their hearts. An artist thought of his studio, its peace, his chaste statue and the graceful model who was there awaiting him. A young man, remembering a lawsuit on which the fate of a family depended, thought of the duty that demanded his presence. The man of science regretted his study and the noble work he was neglecting. All were bitter against themselves. At this moment Émile, fresh and rosy as a fashionable young shop-man, came into the room, laughing.

"You are all uglier than a sheriff's officer," he cried. "You can't do anything to-day; the morning is half over: I propose that we breakfast."

At these words, Taillefer left the room to give orders. The women languidly set about smoothing their hair and repairing the disorder of their dresses before the mirrors. They shook themselves together. The most vicious lectured the more innocent, ridiculing those who seemed hardly able to go on with the coarse revelry. In a few moments, however, the spectres were alive again; they fell into groups, questioned each other, and smiled. A few nimble servants restored order to the furniture and put things in their places; an elegant breakfast was served; and the guests crowded into the dining-room. There, although they all bore the ineffaceable signs of the excesses of the night before, still some traces of life and thought, such as we sometimes see in the last convulsions of the dying, were visible. Like the procession of the Mardi Gras, the saturnalia was buried by the mummers weary of their dances, sick of their drunkenness, and anxious to convict pleasure of stupidity rather than confess its ugliness.

Just as this daring company were taking their seats at the breakfast-table, Cardot, the notary, who had prudently disappeared after dinner, re-appeared at the door with a gentle smile on his official face. He seemed to have discovered some inheritance to divide, or to inventory, an inheritance full of deeds to be drawn, big with fees, as juicy as the fillet into which the amphitryon was then plunging his knife.

"Ho, ho! so we are to breakfast before a notary," cried De Cursy.

"You've come in time to appraise all these fine things," said the banker, pointing to the new banquet.

"We have no wills to make, and as for marriage contracts, I don't know about them," said the man of science, who had made a successful first marriage within a year.

"Oh! Oh!"

"Ah! Ah!"

"One moment," said Cardot, deafened by a chorus of trumpery jokes, "I have come on serious business. I bring six millions for one of you. [Deep silence.] Monsieur," he continued, addressing Raphael, who was at that moment unceremoniously employed in wiping his eyes with the corner of his napkin, "was your mother a demoiselle O'Hara?"

"Yes," answered Raphael, almost mechanically, "Barbara-Maria."

"Have you a certificate of your birth and that of Madame de Valentin?"

"I think so."

"Well, monsieur; you are the sole heir of Major O'Hara, deceased in August, 1828, at Calcutta."

"What a piece of luck!" came from many voices.

"The major having bequeathed several large sums to certain public institutions, his property has been demanded and obtained from the India Company by the French government," resumed the notary; "it is now liquidated and payable to the rightful owners. For the last two weeks I have been vainly searching for the heirs and assigns of Mademoiselle Barbara-Maria O'Hara, and last night, at table —"

Raphael suddenly rose, with the startled movement

of a man who receives a wound. Silent acclamations, as it were, greeted him; the first feeling of the guests was that of sulky envy, and all eyes flamed as they turned upon him. Then a murmur, like that of the pit of a theatre when displeased, a clamor of voices rose and swelled as each guest said his say about the vast fortune thus delivered by the notary. Restored to his full senses by this sudden obedience of destiny to his will, Raphael laid the napkin with which he had lately measured the Magic Skin before him on the table. Without listening to a word that was spoken, he stretched the Skin upon the cloth, and shuddered violently when he saw a slight space between the line marked on the linen and the edges of the Skin itself.

"Well, what's the matter?" cried Taillefer; "he gets his fortune easily —"

"'Support him, Châtillon,'" said Bixiou to Émile, "joy is killing him."

A dreadful pallor defined every muscle in the haggard face of the new heir; his features contracted, the projections of his face whitened, the hollow parts grew dusky, the whole surface was livid and the eyes were fixed. He saw DEATH. This splendid banquet surrounded by faded prostitutes, by surfeited faces, this death-bed of joy, — was it not the image of his life? He looked three times at the talisman which lay within the pitiless lines traced on the napkin; he tried to doubt; but a clear and strong presentiment annihilated his unbelief. The world was his, — he could do all things; but he could wish for nothing. Like the traveller in the desert, he carried a little water to slake his thirst, and he must measure his life by its mouthfuls. He saw that

every desire would cost him days of existence. He believed in that Magic Skin. He listened to his own breathing; he felt he was ill; he asked himself, "Am I consumptive? Did my mother die of a lung disease?"

"Ha, ha, Raphael, what fine amusements you can have! What are you going to give me?" said Aquilina.

"Let us drink to the honor of the deceased uncle, Major Martin O'Hara. What a man!"

"He 'll be peer of France."

"Bah! what's a peer of France since July?" said the critic.

"Shall you have a box at the Bouffons?"

"I hope you 'll make us a feast and give us all our deserts," said Bixiou.

"A man like Raphael knows how to do things handsomely," said Émile.

The cheers of the laughing company echoed in Valentin's ears; but the meaning of their words never reached him; he was thinking vaguely of the mechanical, uneventful life of a Breton peasant, — a life without wishes, burdened by a family, ploughing the fields, eating buckwheat, drinking cider or home-made wine, believing in the Virgin and the King, taking the sacrament at Easter, dancing on the green on Sundays, and understanding not a word of the rector's sermon. The sights that were now spread before the dreamer's eyes, the gilded ceilings, the painted panellings, the women, the feast, the luxury, clutched him as it were by the throat and made him choke.

"Do you wish for some asparagus," asked Taillefer.

"I wish for nothing," cried Raphael, in a voice of thunder.

"Bravo!" returned the banker. "You are beginning to understand wealth; it is a patent of impertinence. You are one of us. Gentlemen, let us drink to the power of gold. Monsieur de Valentin, now six times a millionnaire, assumes power. He is king; he can do all things; he is above all things, like every other rich man. To him in future the first principle of the Charter, '*All Frenchmen are equal before the law*,' is a lie. He does not obey law, law obeys him. There are no scaffolds, no executioners for rich men."

"You mistake," said Raphael; "they are their own executioners."

"That 's another prejudice!" cried the banker.

"Let us drink," said Raphael, putting the talisman into his pocket.

"Don't do that!" said Émile, catching his hand. "Gentlemen," he added, addressing the company, who by this time were a good deal surprised at Raphael's behavior, "you must know that our friend de Valentin — what am I saying? — Monsieur le Marquis de Valentin possesses a secret means of making wealth. His wishes are accomplished the moment that he forms them. Unless he means to behave like a lackey, or a man of no principle, he will now proceed to make us all rich."

"Ah, my little Raphael, give me a set of pearls," cried Euphrasia.

"If he has any gratitude at all he will give me two carriages, each with a pair of beautiful fast horses," said Aquilina.

"Wish me a hundred thousand francs a year."

"To me some cashmeres."

"Pay my debts."

"Send an apoplexy to that old uncle of mine."

"Raphael, I'll let you off for ten thousand francs a year."

"Fine deeds of gift!" cried the notary.

"You might cure my gout."

"Bring down the price of stocks," said the banker.

All these speeches went off like the rockets of the bouquet which ends a display of fireworks. These eager desires were made, perhaps, more in earnest than in jest.

"My dear friend," said Émile, gravely, "I'll be quite satisfied with two hundred thousand francs a year. So now begin to kill yourself with a good grace, come."

"Émile," said Raphael, "you don't know what it would cost me."

"A fine excuse!" cried the poet. "We ought all to sacrifice ourselves to our friends."

"I have a mind to wish for the death of every one of you," answered Valentin, casting a deep and darkling look at the guests.

"Dying men are frightfully cruel," said Émile, laughing. "Here you are, rich," he added, seriously. "Well, I give you two months to become disgustingly selfish. You are already stupid, for you can't understand a joke. The next thing will be that you will actually believe in that Magic Skin of yours."

Raphael, who dreaded the satire of the assembled company kept silence, and drank inordinately, to forget for the time being his fatal power.

PART III.

THE DEATH AGONY.

Early in the month of December an old man, over seventy years of age, was going along the rue de Varennes, unmindful of the rain, and gazing up at the doors of all the houses, looking, with the eagerness of a lover and the absorbed air of a philosopher, for the one belonging to Monsieur le Marquis Raphael de Valentin. An expression of anxious grief, struggling against the will of a despotic nature, was on his face, which was dried like an old parchment shrivelling in the fire, and framed by long gray locks, now hanging in disorder. If a painter had met this singular personage, who was lean and bony, and dressed in black, he would certainly, on returning to his studio, have put a sketch of him into his note-book with the inscription, "Classic poet in search of a rhyme." After making sure of the number of the house, this living palingenesia of Rollin knocked gently at the door of a magnificent hôtel.

"Is Monsieur Raphael at home?" he asked of the porter in livery.

"Monsieur le marquis does not receive visitors," answered the man, swallowing a huge bit of bread which he was dipping in a bowl of coffee.

"I see his carriage," persisted the old man, pointing to a brilliant equipage standing under a wooden roof

painted in stripes like an awning, which projected from the portico and overshadowed the steps. "He must be going out; and I will wait here to speak with him."

"Ah! my old friend, then you may have to wait here till to-morrow morning!" answered the porter. "There is always a carriage standing ready for monsieur. But please go away; I should lose an annuity of six hundred francs if I were to let a stranger into the house without orders."

Just then a tall old man, whose apparel was a good deal like that of an usher in a ministerial office, came out of the vestibule, and down a few steps hastily, to examine the astonished petitioner.

"Well, here 's Monsieur Jonathas," said the porter. "You can ask him."

The two old men, attracted to each other by the sympathy of age, or by mutual curiosity, met in the middle of the large court-yard, where tufts of grass were growing between the paving-stones. A dreadful silence reigned about the house. An observer, looking at Jonathas, would have longed to fathom the mystery that loomed on his face, and appeared in all the details of the gloomy premises. Raphael's first care, after succeeding to the wealth of his uncle, had been to find out what had become of the old and devoted servant, whose affection he could rely. Jonathas wept with joy when he saw his young master, — from whom he had thought himself forever parted, — and his happiness, when the marquis promoted him to the important functions of steward, knew no bounds. The old man became an intermediary power stationed between Valentin and the outer world. Sole manager of his master's

wealth, blind agent of a mysterious thought, he was like a sixth sense through which the emotions of life were brought to Raphael.

"Monsieur, I wish to speak to Monsieur Raphael," said the other old man, pointing to the steps of the portico, as if to ask for shelter from the rain.

"Speak to Monsieur le marquis!" exclaimed the steward. "He scarcely ever speaks to me, his foster-father."

"I am also his foster-father!" said the old man. "If your wife fed him with her milk, I taught him to suck the breast of the Muses. He is my nursling, my child, — *carus alumnus*. I fashioned his brain, cultivated his understanding, developed his genius; and I say it to my own honor and glory. Is he not one of the most remarkable men of our epoch? He was under me in the sixth and third classes, and in rhetoric. I am his professor!"

"Ah! monsieur is Monsieur Porriquet?"

"Precisely. But monsieur —"

"Hush, hush!" said Jonathas to two scullions whose voices broke the dead silence which pervaded the premises.

"Is Monsieur le marquis ill?" asked the professor, anxiously.

"Ah, monsieur, God alone knows what is the matter with him! There's not another house in Paris like this, — do you hear me? — not another. Good God! no. Monsieur le marquis bought it from the former proprietor, — a duke and peer. He has spent three hundred thousand francs in furnishing it; that's not a trifling sum! Every room in the house is a miracle.

Good! when I saw all this magnificence, I said to myself: 'It is his grandfather's time over again; the young master will invite all the world, and the court, too.' Not at all! Monsieur never sees any one. He leads a strange life, Monsieur Porriquet, — do you hear me? — an inconceivable life. He gets up every day at the same hour. None but I — I alone, believe me — am allowed to enter his room. I open his door at seven o'clock, summer and winter. There 's a queer compact between us. After I enter I say, 'Monsieur le marquis, you must wake up; you must dress.' And then he wakes up and dresses. I give him his dressing-gown, always made in the same style and of the same sort of stuff. I am obliged to replace everything when it gets worn, so that he need never ask for new things. Was there ever such a fancy? Well, poor dear, he has a thousand francs a day to spend, and so he can do as he likes! I love him so that if he boxed my right ear I'd turn him the left. He might tell me to do the most difficult things, and I should do them, — *do them*, do you hear me? As for other matters, he makes me attend to such a lot of trifles that I 'm kept busy all the time. Say he reads the papers, — well, I have to put them every morning in the same place on the same table. I am to come at precisely the same hour to shave him, — and don't I tremble? The cook will lose an annuity of a thousand francs, which he is to have at his master's death, if breakfast is not served precisely at ten in the morning and dinner at five. The bill of fare is made out for the whole year, day after day, and no changes allowed. Monsieur le marquis has nothing to wish for. He has strawberries when

there are strawberries, and the first mackerel which comes to Paris. The dinner-list is printed, and he knows it by heart. For the rest, he dresses at the same hour, in the same linen, the same clothes, laid out by me — by me, do you hear me? — on the same chair. I have to see that the cloth of his clothes is always the same; if his overcoat were to get worn out (but that 's only a supposition), I should replace it without saying a word to him. If the weather is fine I go in and say, 'You ought to go out, monsieur.' To that he replies yes, or no. If yes, he is not obliged to wait a moment, — the horses are kept harnessed, the coachman sits on his box, whip in hand, just as you see him over there. In the evening, after dinner, monsieur goes one day to the Français, and another day to the Op — stay, no, he has n't yet been to the Opera, for I could not get a box till yesterday. Then he comes home precisely at eleven o'clock and goes to bed. During the day he does nothing, absolutely nothing, but reads, reads, reads forever; it is a notion he has. I am ordered to study the 'Bookseller's Journal,' and buy all the new books, so that he may find them on his table on the day of publication. It is my business to go into his room every hour and look after the fire and other things, so that he can never want anything. Why, monsieur, he gave me a little book of my duties, — a sort of catechism, which I had to learn by heart! In summer I arrange piles of ice to keep the temperature of his room cool, and put fresh flowers everywhere. Rich! I should think he was rich, — he has a thousand francs a day to get rid of! he can do what he likes now. He was long enough, poor boy, with-

out, as you may say, the necessaries of life! Well, he troubles no one; he is as good as gold. He never speaks; dead silence in the house and garden. But, dull as the life is, my master has n't a wish to gratify; everything goes by clock-work *et recta.* And he is quite right, too; if you don't keep servants up to the mark things are soon at sixes and sevens. I tell him all he ought to do, and he does it. You would n't believe how far he carries that sort of thing! His rooms are in a — a, what do you call it? — suite. Well, suppose he opens his chamber-door, or his study-door, — bang! all the other doors open of themselves by mechanism; and then he goes from end to end of his rooms without finding a single door closed, — very convenient and agreeable for us servants! In short, Monsieur Porriquet, he told me in the beginning, — 'Jonathas, you are to take care of me like a babe in swaddling-clothes,' — swaddling-clothes, yes, monsieur, that 's just what he did say, swaddling-clothes! 'You are to think of all my wants for me.' I 'm the master, — do you hear me? — the master, and he is, after a fashion, the servant. And why? Ah, that 's something nobody in the world knows but himself and the good God! It 's incomprehensible!"

"He must be writing a poem," said the professor.

"Do you think so? Is that so very absorbing? But I don't believe you are right. He often tells me he wants to live like a vegetable, to vegetate. No later than yesterday, Monsieur Porriquet, he looked at a tulip while he was dressing, and he said to me, 'There 's my life. I vegetate, my poor Jonathas.' People are beginning to call it monomania. Well, it 's inconceivable!"

"It all goes to prove, Jonathas," said the professor, in a grave, dictatorial tone which greatly impressed the old valet, "that your master is engaged on some great work. He is plunged in deep and boundless meditation, and he does not choose to be disturbed by the affairs of daily life. A man of genius forgets everything when absorbed in intellectual toil. One day the celebrated Newton —"

"Newton?" said Jonathas, "I don't know him."

"Newton, a great mathematican," resumed Porriquet, "once spent twenty-four hours with his elbows on a table; when he came out of his reverie he thought it was still the day before, just as if he had been to bed and to sleep. I must see Monsieur Raphael, — dear boy, perhaps I can help him," added the professor, making a few steps toward the house.

"Stop!" cried Jonathas. "Were you the king of France, old man, you can't go in there unless you force the doors and walk over my dead body. But, Monsieur Porriquet, I'll go and tell him you are here. I shall say, 'Is he to come up?' and he'll answer, 'Yes,' or 'No.' I am never allowed to ask him, 'Do you wish? Is it your desire? Will you do so and so?' Those words are blotted out of the conversation. Once I forgot myself and blurted out one of them. 'Do you wish to kill me?' he cried in a rage."

Jonathas left the old professor in the vestibule, making him a sign that he was to come no farther; he soon returned however with a favorable answer and conducted the old emeritus through a suite of sumptuous apartments the doors of which were all open. Porriquet saw his old pupil in the distance sitting beside the fire-

place. Wrapped in a dressing-gown made of some stuff with a large pattern, and sunken in a padded arm-chair, Raphael was reading a newspaper. The deep melancholy to which he seemed a victim was expressed in the helpless attitude of his weakened body; it was stamped on his brow, on his face, pale as an etiolated plant. A certain effeminate grace and the fanciful air peculiar to rich invalids clung about him. His hands, like those of a pretty woman, were softly and delicately white. His fair hair, now very thin, curled about the temples with dainty coquetry. A Greek cap, dragged down by a tassel too heavy for the slight cashmere of which it was made, hung on one side of his head. He had let a malachite paper-knife with a gold handle which he had been using to cut the leaves of a book, drop at his feet. On his knees was the amber mouth-piece of an Indian hookah whose enamelled spirals lay like a serpent on the floor; but he had forgotten to inhale its fragrant odors. And yet, the pervading feebleness of this young body was belied by the blue eyes; life seemed to concentrate within them and to shine with an extraordinary perception which took in at a glance everything about him. That look was painful to behold. Some would have called it despairing; others might have read it to mean an inward struggle more terrible even than remorse. It was, in truth, the deep and all-embracing glance of a powerless man driving his desires back into the depths of his soul; the glance of the miser gloating in thought over pleasures his money might bring him, but which he denies himself rather than spend it; the glance of a chained Prometheus, of the fallen Emperor when he discovered at the Elysée, in 1815, the

strategic blunder of his enemies, and asked for twenty-four hours of command, which were denied him. It was the look of a conqueror, and yet the look of a lost soul, -- the same look that some months earlier Raphael had cast at his last bit of gold as he threw it on the gambling-table, the same that a few minutes later he had cast at the Seine.

He now submitted his will, his intellect, to the coarse common-sense of the old peasant who was only half-civilized after fifty years of servitude. Almost happy in thus becoming a species of automaton, he abdicated life that he might live, and stripped his soul of every wish and of all the glories of desire. He made himself chaste after the manner of Origen, emasculating his imagination that he might the better struggle with that cruel Power whose challenge he had rashly accepted. The morrow of the day on which, suddenly enriched by his uncle's will, he had seen the Magic Skin perceptibly diminish, he was at the house of his notary. There he chanced to meet a physician who related how a native of Switzerland had cured himself of consumption. The man never spoke for ten years, compelled himself to breathe only six times a minute, in the close air of a cow-house, following a rigid diet. "I will live like that man," thought Raphael, resolved to live at any price. In the midst of luxury he led the life of a steam-engine.

The old professor shuddered as he looked at him; everything about that frail and debilitated body seemed to him artificial. The recollection of his fresh and rosy pupil with alert young limbs came to his mind as he met the burning eye of the marquis and saw the weight of thought upon his brow. If the old classic scholar, a

sagacious critic and preserver of the style of a past day, had ever read Lord Byron he would have fancied that he saw Manfred where he expected to have seen Childe Harold.

"Good morning, Père Porriquet," said Raphael to his old teacher, taking the cold fingers of the old man into his own burning hand. "How are you?"

"I am very well," answered the old man, frightened by the touch of that feverish hand; "and you?"

"Oh! I hope to keep myself in good health."

"You are engaged, I suppose, on some great work?"

"No," answered Raphael. "*Exegi monumentum;* I have closed the books and bid adieu to Science. I really don't know where my manuscripts are."

"Your style was pure," said the professor, "I hope you have not adopted the barbaric language of the new school, who thought they did a marvellous deed in producing Ronsard?"

"My work is purely physiological."

"Oh, I am sorry," replied the professor. "When it comes to science, grammar must lend itself to the necessities of discovery. Nevertheless, my dear boy, a clear style which is also harmonious, like that of Massillon, Monsieur de Buffon, and the great Racine, a classical style, can never injure anything. But, my friend," said the old man, interrupting himself, "I am forgetting the object of my visit. It is one of self-interest."

Remembering too late the rhetorical eloquence to which a long professorship had trained his old master, Raphael regretted having admitted him, and was about to wish that he would go, when he suddenly strangled

the secret desire as his eyes fell on the Magic Skin hanging before him. It was fastened to a white cloth, on which its fateful outlines were carefully drawn by a strong red line which accurately marked them. Since the fatal banquet, Raphael had subdued the very least of his desires, endeavoring to live in a way to give no cause of shrinking to the terrible talisman. That piece of magic leather was like a tiger with whom he was compelled to live without exciting its ferocity. He therefore listened patiently to the prolixities of the old professor. It took Père Porriquet nearly an hour to relate certain persecutions to which he had been subjected since the Revolution of July. The worthy soul, wishing for a strong government, had imprudently uttered a patriotic desire that grocers would attend to their own business, statesmen to the conduct of public affairs, lawyers to their cases, and peers of France to their duties at the Luxembourg. But one of the popular ministers of the citizen-king had resented his opinions, turned him out of his professorship, and called him a Carlist. He now came, less for himself than for those dependent on him, to entreat his former pupil to obtain for him the position of principal in one of the Government provincial colleges. Raphael was falling a victim to irrepressible sleepiness, when the monotonous voice of the professor suddenly ceased to murmur in his ears. Forced, out of politeness, to look into the faded and almost lifeless eyes of the old man as he uttered his slow and wearisome sentences, Raphael had been first stupefied, then magnetized by some inexplicable inert force.

"Well, my good Père Porriquet," he answered,

without really knowing to what request he was replying, "I can do nothing, — really nothing at all. I sincerely wish you may succeed —".

As he spoke, and without at all perceiving the effect his selfish and indifferent words produced upon the sallow, wrinkled face of the old man, Raphael suddenly sprang up like a frightened deer. He saw a slight white line between the edge of the black Skin and the broad red mark, and he uttered so dreadful a cry that the poor professor was terrified.

"Go, go, old fool!" he cried; "you will get that place you want, whatever it is. Why could you not have asked me for an annuity rather than a homicidal wish? Your visit would then have cost me nothing. There are a hundred thousand employments in France, and I have but one life. The life of a man is worth more than all the appointments in the universe — Jonathas!"

Jonathas appeared.

"This is your doing, you triple fool! Why did you tell me to receive him?" he cried, pointing to the petrified old man. "Did I put my soul in your keeping to let you rend it in pieces? You have torn ten years of life away from me. One more such act, and you will follow me where I followed my father. Would I not rather have wished and obtained my beautiful Fedora than have done a service to that old carcass, that rag of humanity? I might have given him gold — Besides, if all the Porriquets in the world died of hunger, what is that to me?"

Anger blanched his face; a slight foam came upon his trembling lips; the expression of his eye was blood-

thirsty. At sight of him the two old men shuddered convulsively, like children beholding a snake. The young man fell back into his chair; a species of reaction took place within him, and the tears flowed profusely from his flaming eyes.

"Oh, my life! my beautiful life!" he said. "No more beneficent thoughts! no more love! Nothing, — nothing!" He turned to the professor. "The harm is done, old friend," he continued, in a gentle voice. "I have largely rewarded you for all your care of me. My misfortune has at least benefited a worthy man."

There was so much feeling in the tone with which he uttered these almost unintelligible words that the two old men wept as one weeps on hearing some tender air sung in a foreign language.

"He must be epileptic," said Porriquet, in a low voice.

"I thank you for that thought my friend," said Raphael, gently. "You wish to excuse me. Disease is an accident; inhumanity is vice. Leave me now," he added. "You will receive to-morrow, or the day after, or perhaps to-night, the appointment you are seeking, for *resistance* has triumphed over *action*. Adieu!"

The old man went away horror-stricken, and full of anxiety as to Raphael's mental state. The scene struck him as bordering on the supernatural. He doubted his own perceptions, and asked himself if he were not waking from a painful dream.

"Listen to me, Jonathas!" said the young man to his old valet. "Try to understand the mission I have confided to you."

"Yes, Monsieur le marquis."

"I am a man outside of all ordinary laws."

"Yes, Monsieur le marquis."

"All the delights of life are dancing like beautiful women around my dying bed. If I call to them, I die. Death! always death! You must be the barrier between the world and me."

"Yes, Monsieur le marquis," repeated the old man, wiping great drops of sweat from his wrinkled brow. "But if you do not wish to see beautiful women, how can you go to the opera to-night? An English family who are returning to London have let me hire their box for the rest of the season; and it is one of the best — a capital box, on the first tier!"

Raphael had sunk into a reverie, and no longer listened.

Do you see that luxurious carriage, — a simple coupé externally, painted brown, and on its panels the arms of an ancient and noble family? As it passes rapidly, the grisettes admire it, and covet the satin lining, the carpet from the Savonnerie, the gimps, the soft cushions, and the plate-glass windows. Two lackeys in livery stand behind that aristocratic equipage; but within it, against the satin lining, lies a fevered head, with livid circles round the sunken eyes, — Raphael's head, sad and thoughtful. Awful image of wealth! He crosses Paris like a meteor; arrives at the portico of the Théâtre Favart; the steps of the carriage are let down; the two footmen support him; an envious crowd watch him.

Raphael walked slowly through the corridor; he

allowed himself none of the pleasures he had formerly coveted. While waiting for the second act of the Semiramide, he went along the passages and up and down the foyer, forgetting his new box, which he had not yet entered. The sense of possession no longer existed in his breast. Like all sick folk, he thought only of his malady. Leaning against the mantle-shelf of the foyer, around which were circulating the old and the young men of fashion, past and present ministers of state, and a whole society of speculators and journalists, Raphael noticed near by him a strange and even supernatural figure. He advanced, staring somewhat insolently at the fantastic being, that he might get a nearer view of him. "What a wonderful bit of painting!" was his first thought. The hair, eye-brows, and pointed tuft on the chin, à la Mazarin, were dyed black; but the coloring matter, being applied to hair that was too white to take it well, had given the whole an unnatural purplish tinge, the tints of which changed under the more or less vivid reflection of the lights. His face was flat and narrow, the wrinkles were filled up with thick layers of rouge and white enamel, and the whole expression was crafty, yet anxious. The application of paint had been neglected on certain parts of the face, and the omission brought out oddly the man's decrepitude and his leaden skin. It was impossible not to laugh at that strange head, with the pointed chin and the projecting forehead, resembling, as it did, those grotesque wooden faces carved in Germany by shepherds during their waiting hours.

If an observer had examined alternately this old Adonis and Raphael, he would have seen in the mar-

quis the eyes of a young man behind a mask of old age, and in this strange being the sunken eyes of decrepitude beneath the mask of youth. Valentin tried to recall where and under what circumstances he had seen the strange old mummy, now fashionably booted and cravatted, crossing his arms and clicking his heels, as if he had all the vigor of petulant youth at his command. His step had nothing constrained or artificial about it. An elegant coat, carefully buttoned, covered a strong and bony frame, giving him the general look of an old dandy who clings to the last fashion. This extraordinary puppet, full of life, had all the charms of an apparition to Raphael; he gazed at him as though he were some smoke-dried Rembrandt, recently restored, varnished, and put in a new frame. This comparison suddenly brought light into the tangle of his confused recollections; he recognized the old antiquary, the man to whom he owed his misery.

At that instant a sort of silent laugh came from the fantastic being, and stretched his cold lips, already strained over a set of false teeth. As he noticed it, Raphael's vivid imagination showed him the striking likeness between this man and the ideal heads which painters give to the Mephistopheles of Goethe. Superstition seized upon the strong mind of the young man; he suddenly believed in the power of the Devil, in the witchcraft of the Middle Ages handed down to us in legends and by the poets. He turned with horror from the fate of Faust, and prayed heaven with a sudden impulse, like that of the dying, for faith in God and the Virgin Mary. A pure and radiant light showed him the heaven of Michael Angelo and of Sanzio Urbino,

the parting clouds, the white-bearded old man, the winged heads, and a beautiful woman rising from the lambent glory. He comprehended, he grasped the idea of those glorious creations whose human mission explained to him his probation and gave him hope.

But, as his eyes came back to the foyer of the opera-house, he saw, not the Virgin, but the odious Euphrasia. The danseuse, with her light and supple body clothed in a dazzling dress, and covered with oriental pearls, went up to the impatient old man, exhibiting her person, her bold and insolent brow, her sparkling eyes, to the envious and calculating crowd, as though to proclaim the boundless wealth of the old lover whose treasures she was dissipating. Raphael recollected the jeering wish with which he had accepted the fatal present of the antiquary, and he tasted the sweets of vengeance as he beheld the deep humiliation of that high wisdom whose overthrow had so lately seemed impossible. The centenarian greeted Euphrasia with a charnel smile, to which she responded by words of love; he offered her his shrunken arm, made two or three turns up and down the foyer and welcomed with delight the compliments and eager looks bestowed upon his mistress, without perceiving the sneering laughter and the cutting jeers of which he was the object.

"In what cemetery did that young ghoul disinter him?" cried the most elegant of the romanticists.

Euphrasia smiled. The speaker was a young man with fair hair and brilliant blue eyes, slender and lithe in figure, wearing a small moustache, a short frock-coat, and his hat over one ear; his prominent gift was a lively power of repartee, — the only language of his school.

"How many old men," thought Raphael, "end a life of honor and uprightness, of toil and virtue, by such folly; see that one, with his cold feet, making love! Well, monsieur," he said, stopping the old antiquary and flinging a glance at Euphrasia, "have you forgotten the stern maxims of your philosophy?"

"Ah," replied the old Adonis, in a quavering voice, "I am now as happy as a young man! I took life at the wrong end; the whole of it is summed up in an hour of love."

At this moment the spectators were recalled by the stage-bell, and they all hurried to take their seats. Raphael and the old man parted. As the marquis entered his box he saw Fedora on the other side of the theatre, exactly opposite to him. Apparently, she had just arrived, and was throwing her scarf aside, and displaying her throat, with the indescribable movements of a beauty engaged in placing herself becomingly. All eyes were turned to her. A young peer of France accompanied the countess, and she presently asked him for the opera-glass she had allowed him to carry. The gesture and the look she gave this new companion were enough to tell Raphael the tyranny to which he was subjected. Fascinated, no doubt, as he himself had been, like him struggling with the mighty power of a true love against the cold calculations of a hard woman, the young man was, in all probability, suffering the torments from which Valentin had now escaped. An expression of joy came upon Fedora's face when, after turning her glass upon all the boxes and rapidly surveying all the toilets, she was conscious of eclipsing by her dress and by her beauty the prettiest

and the most elegant women in Paris. She began to laugh, and show her white teeth, and to move her head, and the quivering wreath of flowers that adorned it. Her eyes went from box to box, ridiculing here a turban awkwardly placed on the head of a Russian princess, there an ugly bonnet which disfigured the daughter of a banker. Suddenly she turned pale as she met Raphael's fixed gaze; her rejected lover withered her with an intolerable glance of contempt. None of her other banished lovers denied her charm. Valentin alone showed her that he was safe from her seductions. When Power is once defied with impunity, it is tending toward ruin. This maxim is more deeply engraved in the heart of woman than in the head of kings. Fedora saw in Raphael the death of her prestige. A speech of his, uttered a few nights earlier, had gone the rounds of all the salons in Paris, and the slash of its epigram had given the countess a mortal blow. We can cauterize a wound, but we know no remedy for the hurt produced by speech. All the women present were looking alternately at the marquis and at the countess, and Fedora would gladly at that moment have consigned her enemy to the dungeons of the Bastille, for she well knew that in spite of her talent for dissimulation her rivals guessed her sufferings.

During the interlude between the first and second acts, a lady seated herself close to Raphael in the adjoining box, which had hitherto been empty. A murmur of admiration went through the house. The sea of human faces turned in a tide toward her, and all eyes gazed at the beautiful unknown. Young and old made so prolonged a stir during the time when the curtain was down

that the musicians in the orchestra turned to discover the reason. The women were busy with their opera-glasses, and the old men, renewing their youth, rubbed the lenses of theirs. But the enthusiasm subsided by degrees as the curtain went up, and all was again orderly. Good society, ashamed of having yielded to a spontaneous feeling, returned to its aristocratic coldness and its polished manners. Rich people do not like to be surprised and delighted by anything; they try to seize at once on some defect in a fine work, and so release themselves from the vulgar sentiment of admiration. A few men, however, neglecting the music, remained lost in natural and honest admiration of Raphael's neighbor. Valentin noticed in one of the lower boxes the ignoble and florid face of Taillefer, who was accompanied by Aquilina. Next he saw Émile standing in the stalls, and seeming to say to him, "Why don't you look at that beautiful creature beside you?" And then Rastignac, accompanied by a young woman, doubtless a widow, who sat twisting his gloves like a man in despair at being chained where he was, and unable to get nearer to the enchanting unknown.

Raphael's life depended on a compact, still unbroken, which he had made with his own soul; he had pledged himself not to look with interest on any woman. Still under the dominion of the terror he had felt in the morning, when, on the mere expression of a civil wish the talisman shrank visibly, he firmly resolved not to turn in the direction of his neighbor. Seated like a duchess with his back in the angle of the box, he rudely obstructed his neighbor's view of half the stage, and seemed purposely to ignore the fact that a pretty

woman was behind him. The lady, on the other hand, did much as he did. She rested her elbow on the edge of the box and looked at the singers with her head at three quarters, as if sitting for her picture. The two were like a pair of lovers who, having quarrelled and turned their backs on one another, are ready to embrace at the first loving word. Occasionally the light swan's-down on the lady's mantle or a waft of her hair touched Raphael's head, and gave him a sensation against which he struggled bravely; he heard the feminine rustle of a silken dress, and felt the imperceptible movement given by the act of breathing to the shoulders and the garments of the hidden woman, all of whose sweet being was suddenly communicated to Raphael as by an electric spark, the lace and the swan's-down transmitting faithfully to his shoulder the delicious warmth of that other life. By the capricious will of Nature these two persons, held apart by good manners, separated by the fear of death, were breathing as one being and perhaps thinking of each other. The penetrating perfume of aloes completed Raphael's subjugation. His excited imagination, roused by hindrances which seemed almost fantastic, pictured the woman to his mind in lines of fire. He turned abruptly. Shocked, no doubt, to find herself in such close contact with a stranger, the unknown lady made a like movement; their faces, expressive of the same thought, were before each other's eyes.

"Pauline!"

"Monsieur Raphael!"

Petrified, they looked at each other a moment in silence. Raphael saw Pauline in a simple but elegant

dress. Through the gauze that covered her shoulders a practised eye could see the whiteness of the lily, and a shape that women themselves would have admired. Her virginal modesty, her celestial innocence, her graceful attitude were all there. The movement of the sleeve that covered the arm showed that the body was palpitating with the beating of her heart.

"Oh, come to-morrow," she said; "come to the Hôtel Saint-Quentin and get your manuscript. I will be there at mid-day. Be punctual."

She rose hastily and disappeared. Raphael thought of following, but refrained, lest he should compromise her; then he looked at Fedora and thought her ugly. Not being able to understand or even hear a note of the music, suffocating in the close air, and with a swelling heart he left the theatre and went home.

"Jonathas," he said to his old servant as he was going to bed; "give me some laudanum on a piece of sugar, and do not wake me till twenty minutes of twelve to-morrow."

"I wish to be loved by Pauline," he said the next morning, looking fixedly at the talisman with indescribable anxiety.

The Skin made no movement, — it seemed to have lost its contractile power; doubtless it could not grant a wish that was already accomplished.

"Ah!" cried Raphael, feeling himself delivered as from a leaden mantle which he had worn since the day on which he had received the fatal gift, "thou art a liar; thou dost not obey me; the compact is at an end. I am free! I shall live! It was all a miserable joke."

Though he said these words, he dared not believe his

own thought. He dressed plainly, as in the old days, and went on foot to his former abode, trying to take himself back to those happy days when he could fearlessly yield to his passionate desires, and before he had learned to gauge all human enjoyment. He walked along thinking, not of the Pauline of his attic-room, but the Pauline of the night before, that perfect mistress of whom he had dreamed, the brilliant, loving, artistic young girl, comprehending the poets, comprehending poetry and living in the lap of luxury, — in a word, Fedora endowed with a noble soul, or Pauline countess and millionnaire. When he found himself on the broken doorstep and the worn-out threshold of that house where so often thoughts of despair had overwhelmed him, he was met by an old woman who said, —

"Are you Monsieur Raphael de Valentin?"

"Yes, my good woman," he answered.

"You know your old room," she continued; "there 's some one expecting you."

"Is the hôtel still kept by Madame Gaudin?"

"Oh, no, monsieur; Madame Gaudin is now a baroness. She lives in a beautiful house of her own across the river. Her husband has returned. Goodness! he brought back I don't know how much money. They say she has got enough to buy up the whole quartier Saint-Jacques if she liked. She gave me her business here and the remainder of her lease gratis. Ah, she 's a good woman. She 's not a bit prouder to-day than she was yesterday."

Raphael ran lightly up to his garret, and as he reached the last flight he heard the sound of the piano. Pauline was there, modestly attired in a cambric dress; but the

fashion of it, the hat, the gloves, the shawl thrown carelessly on the bed, all told of wealth.

"Ah, here you are," cried Pauline, turning her head and rising with a childlike movement of delight.

Raphael sat down by her, blushing, abashed, and happy. He looked at her and said nothing.

"Why did you leave us?" she asked, lowering her eyes as the color rose in her cheeks. "What became of you?"

"Ah, Pauline, I have been, I still am very unhappy."

"I felt it," she cried, much moved. "I guessed it last night when I saw you so well dressed, so rich apparently, but in reality — tell me, Monsieur Raphael, is it as it used to be?"

Valentin could not restrain himself; tears filled his eyes as he cried out, "Pauline! — I —" He could say no more, but his eyes sparkled with love, his heart was in the look he gave her.

"Oh, he loves me, he loves me," cried Pauline.

Raphael made a sign with his head, for he felt himself unable to utter a word. As she saw it, the young girl took his hand, pressed it, and said to him, half laughing, half sobbing: —

"Rich, rich, happy, rich! thy Pauline is rich. But I ought to be poor this day; a thousand times have I declared that I would give the wealth of the universe to hear him say 'I love thee!' Oh, my Raphael! I have millions. Luxury is dear to thee and thou shalt have it; but thou must love my heart also, it is so full of love for thee. Let me tell thee all. My father has returned. I am an heiress. My parents allow me to decide my own fate. I am free, free, — dost thou understand me?"

Raphael held her hands in a sort of wild delirium, kissing them so passionately, so eagerly, that his kisses seemed like a convulsion. Pauline disengaged her hands and threw them on his shoulders, holding him; they understood each other, and heart to heart they embraced with that sacred, delicious fervor, free from all ulterior thought, which is granted to one only kiss, the first kiss, by which two souls take possession of each other.

"Ah," cried Pauline, falling back in her chair, "I will never leave thee. — How is it that I am so bold?" she added, blushing.

"Bold, my Pauline! Oh, fear nothing; it is love, true love, deep, eternal as my own; tell me, is it not?"

"Oh, speak, speak, speak," she said; "too long thy lips were mute to me."

"Didst thou love me in those early days?"

"Ah, God! did I not love him? Many a time have I wept there as I put thy room in order, grieving for thy poverty and mine. I would have sold myself to a demon could I have spared thee grief. To-day, *my* Raphael, — for thou art mine, mine that dear head, mine thy heart! Oh, yes, thy heart, thy heart above all, eternal wealth! Ah, where am I; what was I saying?" she cried, after a pause. "I know, it was this, — we have three, four five millions. If I were poor, I might desire to bear thy name, to be thy wife; but now, at this moment, I would sacrifice the whole world to thee. I would be ever and always thy servant. Raphael, if to-day I offer thee my heart, my love, my fortune, I give thee no more than what I gave that day when I placed there," she said, pointing to the table-drawer, "a certain five-franc piece. Oh, what grief thy joy caused me that day."

"Why art thou rich?" cried Raphael. "Why hast thou no vanity, no self, — I can do nothing for thee."

He wrung his hands with happiness, despair, and love.

"I know thee, celestial soul! To be my wife, Madame la Marquise de Valentin, to have that title and my wealth is less to thee —"

"— than a single hair of thine," she cried.

"I too have millions; but what is wealth to us? Ah! I have my life — my life to offer thee; take it."

"Thy love, my Raphael, is more to me than the whole universe. Why, thy very thought is mine; am I not in truth the happiest of the happy?"

"Can we be overheard?" said Raphael.

"Nay, there is no one," she said, with a pretty gesture.

"Then come!" he cried, opening his arms to her.

She sprang to him and clasped her hands around his neck. "Kiss me," she said, "for all the griefs thou hast made me suffer; for all the suffering thy joys once gave me; for all the nights I spent upon my screens."

"Thy screens?"

"Since we are rich, my treasure, I can tell thee all. Poor darling! how easy it is to deceive a man of genius. Can white waistcoats and clean shirts be had daily for three francs of washing a month? And you drank twice as much milk as your money could buy. Oh! I tricked you in everything, — fuel, oil, money even. Oh, my Raphael, don't take me for your wife," she cried, laughing, "I am too wily."

"But how did you manage it?"

"I painted till two o'clock every night," she said,

"and I divided the price of my screens between my mother and you."

They looked at each other for a moment, bewildered with joy and love.

"Oh!" cried Raphael. "We shall pay for this happiness by some frightful grief—"

"Are you married?" cried Pauline. "Ah! I will not yield thee to any woman."

"I am free, my treasure."

"Free!" she repeated. "Free, and mine!"

She slipped to her knees, clasping her hands and looking up to Raphael with passionate devotion.

"I fear I am going mad. How noble thou art!" she cried, passing her hand through his blond hair. "Ah! how stupid she was, that countess of thine, Fedora! What delight it gave me last night to please those people at the theatre. She was never honored with such a tribute. Listen, dearest; when my shoulder touched thy arm, a voice cried within me, *He is there!* I turned and saw thee! Oh, I fled away, for the desire seized me to fall upon thy neck in face of all the world."

"Thou art happy in being able to speak," cried Raphael; "as for me, my heart is in a vice. I want to weep, and I cannot. No, leave me thy hand. Would that I could stay beside thee all my life, looking at thee thus, happy—happy and content."

"Ah! say those words again, my love."

"What are words?" said Valentin, letting a hot tear fall upon Pauline's hand. "Later I will try to tell thee of my love; now I can but feel it."

"Oh!" she cried, "that noble soul, that lofty genius,

that heart I know so well, are mine, all mine, even as I am his — "

" — forever and ever, my gentle creature," said Raphael, deeply moved. " Thou wilt be my wife, my guardian spirit. Thy presence has always driven away my griefs and refreshed my soul; at this moment thy smile does, as it were, purify me. I believe a new life opens to me. The cruel past and my sad follies seem to me like evil dreams. Beside thee I am pure. I breathe the air of happiness. Oh! be with me ever," he cried, pressing her solemnly to his beating heart.

" Let death come now," cried Pauline, in ecstasy, " for I have lived."

Happy he who can divine their joys, for he has known them.

" My Raphael," said Pauline, after a short silence. " I should like to think that no one could ever enter this dear garret."

" Then we must wall up the door, put iron bars to the window, and buy the house," said the marquis.

" Ah, so we will," she cried; then after a moment's silence, she added, " thy manuscripts — we have forgotten them."

And they both laughed with innocent delight.

" Bah! what care I for all the science of the world," cried Raphael.

" Ah, monsieur, but think of fame."

" Thou art my fame! " —

" He was unhappy when he wrote those words," she said, turning over the leaves of the manuscript.

" My Pauline — "

" Yes, yes, I am thy Pauline. Well, what then? "

"Where do you live?"

"Rue Saint-Lazare, and thou?"

"Rue de Varennes."

"We shall be so far from each other until—" She stopped and looked at her lover with a shy, coquettish air.

"But," said Raphael, "it can only be for a week or two at most that we are separated."

"Can it be? shall we be married in fifteen days?" she sprang up like a child. "Ah, but I am a bad daughter," she said. "I think no more of father, mother,—I think of nothing in the world but thee. Thou dost not know, poor darling, that my father is ill. He returned from the Indies so feeble that he came near dying at Havre, where my mother and I went to meet him. Oh, heavens!" she cried looking at her watch; "it is three o'clock. I must be back when he wakes up at four. I am mistress of the house, for my dear mother does all I wish, and my father adores me; but I will never abuse their goodness, it would be wrong. Poor father! he sent me to the opera last night. You will come and see him to-morrow, will you not?"

"Will Madame la Marquise de Valentin do me the honor to take my arm?"

"Let me carry off the key of this dear room," she said. "Our treasure is a palace, is it not?"

"Pauline, one more kiss."

"A thousand! Ah, my love," she said, looking at Raphael, "will it be ever thus, or am I dreaming?"

They slowly descended the stairs; and thus united, step by step, trembling under the weight of the same happiness, pressing closely together like doves, they

reached the place de la Sorbonne, where Pauline's carriage was in waiting.

"I wish to go home with you," she cried. "I want to see your room, your study; to sit beside the table at which you work. It will seem like old times," she added, blushing. "Joseph," she said to the footman, "I shall go to the rue de Varennes before returning home. It is a quarter past three; I must be home at four. Tell George to press the horses."

And the two lovers were soon at the Hôtel Valentin.

"Oh, how glad I am to have seen it all," cried Pauline, stroking the silken curtains which draped the bed. "I can now think of thy dear head upon that pillow. Tell me, Raphael, did any one advise thee how to furnish these rooms?"

"No one."

"Truly? No woman?"

"Pauline!"

"I feel a dreadful jealousy. What exquisite taste thou hast; to-morrow I will make my room like thine."

Raphael, beside himself with happiness, caught her in his arms.

"And now let me go to my father," she said.

"I shall go with you," cried Valentin, "let us not be parted more than we can help."

"How loving you are!"

"Are you not my life?"

It were wearisome indeed to recount the pretty eloquence of love, to which the tones, the looks, the gestures alone give value. Valentin took Pauline to her home, and then returned to his, with a heart as full of pleasure as a man can feel and bear in this low

world. When he was once more seated in his arm-chair beside the fire, thinking of the sudden and complete realization of his highest hopes, a chill thought crossed his mind like the steel of a knife cutting through his breast. He looked up at the Magic Skin; it had shrunk. He uttered the great French oath, but without the jesuitical reservations of the Abbesse des Andouillettes, leaned his head on the back of his chair, and remained long with his eyes fixed upon the drapery of a window, but without seeing anything.

"Good God!" he cried, at length. "What, every desire, all? Oh, poor Pauline!"

He took a pair of compasses and measured how much of life that morning's joy had cost him.

"I have but two months more," he said.

A cold sweat issued from his pores; suddenly he obeyed an irrepressible impulse of anger and seized the Skin, crying out, "I am a fool!" Then he rushed from the house and through the garden, and flung the talisman to the bottom of a well.

"*Vogue la galère!*" he cried; "come what may. To the devil with such nonsense!"

Raphael now abandoned himself to the joy of loving, and lived heart to heart with his Pauline. Their marriage, retarded by a few difficulties, uninteresting to the reader, took place early in March. They had tried each other and felt no doubts; happiness revealed to them the strength of their affection, and no two souls, no two natures were ever more perfectly united than theirs by love. Studying themselves, they grew to love each other better; on either side the same delicacy, the same modesty, the same enjoyments of the soul, — the

sweetest of all enjoyments, that of the angels. No clouds were in their sky; by turns the wishes of the one were a law to the other. Both were rich; there were no caprices they could not satisfy, and therefore they had no caprices. An exquisite taste, a feeling for the beautiful, a true sense of poetry was in the nature of the wife; despising the baubles of wealth, one smile of her lover was more to her than the pearls of Ormuz. Muslin and flowers were her choicest adornment. By mutual consent they avoided society, for solitude was to them so fruitful, so beautiful. People saw the charming pair at the opera or at the theatres, and if some gossip ran the rounds of the salons, soon the rush of events caused them to be forgotten, and left alone to their happiness.

One morning when the weather had grown warm enough to give promise of the joys of spring, Pauline and Raphael were breakfasting in a small conservatory, a sort of salon filled with flowers, on a level with the garden. The sun's rays falling through rare shrubs warmed the atmosphere; the contrasting colors of the leafage, the clustering flowers, and the capricious variations of light and shade, were enlivening to the eye. While all Paris was still warming itself by cheerless hearths, the young couple were laughing in a bower of camellias and heaths and lilacs. Their joyous heads were side by side among narcissus and lilies of the valley and Bengal roses. The floor of the conservatory was covered with an African mat, colored like a carpet. The walls, hung with green canvas, showed not a trace of dampness. The furniture was apparently of rough wood, but the bark shone with cleanliness. A kitten

crouching on the table, attracted by the scent of the milk, allowed Pauline to paint its whiskers with coffee as she kept it at arm's length from the cream, tantalizing it to continue the play, laughing with all her heart at its antics, and endeavoring to prevent Raphael from reading the newspaper, which had dropped many times from his hand. The pretty morning scene was full of inexpressible happiness, like all else that is natural and true and gay. Raphael pretended to read his paper, but he was all the while furtively watching Pauline as she frolicked with the cat, — his Pauline, wrapped in a long white morning dress, which scarcely concealed her shape, his own Pauline, with her hair flowing and her little white feet veined with blue in their velvet slippers. Charming in dishabille, fairy-like as a figure of Westall's, she was girl and woman both, perhaps more girl than woman; her happiness was without alloy, and she knew love only through its earlier joys.

Just as Raphael, wholly absorbed in his sweet reverie, dropped his journal for the tenth time, Pauline caught it, crumpled it into a ball and flung it into the garden, where it rolled, like the politics it contained, over and over upon itself, pursued by the kitten. When Raphael, roused by the scene, made a movement to pick up his paper, their joyous laughter broke forth and died away, and came again like the song of birds.

"I am jealous of that newspaper," cried Pauline, wiping the tears her merry laughter had occasioned. "It is felony," she asserted, becoming once more a woman, "to read those Russian proclamations in my presence, and to prefer the prose of the Emperor Nicholas to the words and looks of love."

"I was not reading, my love, my darling; I was looking at you."

At this moment the heavy step of the gardener, grinding on the gravel, was heard near the greenhouse.

"I beg pardon, Monsieur le marquis, if I interrupt you and madame; but I bring you a curiosity, the like of which I never saw. In drawing a bucket of water just now I brought up a queer marine plant. Here it is. Strange, though it lives in the water, it is n't wet nor even damp; it is as dry as a bit of wood, and not the least swollen. As Monsieur le marquis knows so much, I thought it would interest him."

So saying, the man showed Raphael the inexorable Skin, now reduced to a surface of six square inches.

"Thank you, Vanière," said Raphael; "the thing is very curious."

"My angel, what is the matter?" cried Pauline; "you have turned pale."

"Leave us, Vanière."

"Your voice frightens me," cried the young girl; "it is so strangely altered. What is it? How do you feel? Where is the trouble? Oh, you are ill! A doctor!" she cried. "Jonathas, help!"

"My Pauline, hush," answered Raphael, recovering his presence of mind. "Let us leave this place; there is a flower somewhere about, whose perfume turned me faint. Perhaps it was that verbena."

Pauline darted on the harmless plant, seized it by the stem, and flung it into the garden.

"Oh, angel!" she cried, straining Raphael to her breast in a clasp as strong as love itself, and putting her coral lips with plaintive coquetry to his, "as I saw thee

turning faint, I knew I could not survive thee. Thy life is my life, Raphael: feel, pass thy hand along my back; I felt a death-blow there; I am all cold. — Thy lips are burning, but thy hand is ice," she added.

"Silly girl," cried Raphael.

"Why those tears? Ah, let me drink them!"

"Oh, Pauline, Pauline, we love each other too well."

"Something strange is happening within thee, Raphael. Be true with me, for I shall know thy secret soon. Give me that," she said, taking the Magic Skin.

"It is my death," cried the young man, casting a look of horror at the talisman.

"Oh, what a change in his voice!" exclaimed Pauline, letting fall the fatal symbol.

"Dost thou love me?" he said.

"Do I love thee? Canst thou ask it?"

"Then leave me, leave me. Go!"

The poor girl left him.

"Can it be," cried Raphael when alone, "that in this age of discovery, when we have even learned that diamonds are crystals of carbon, an epoch when all things are explained, when the police would indict a new Messiah before the courts and submit his miracles to the Academy of Sciences, a day when the world believes in nothing but the deeds of a notary, can it be that I am believing — I — in a sort of Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin? No, by God himself, I will not think that the All-Powerful can find pleasure in torturing a human soul. I will consult some man of science."

Before long Raphael was standing between the Wine Market, an immense collection of hogsheads, and the

Salpêtrière, an immense seminary of drunkards, at a certain spot where, in a little pool, a number of ducks were disporting themselves, all remarkable as rare species, whose prismatic colors, like the windows of a cathedral, were sparkling in the rays of the sun. All the ducks of the world were there, quacking, dabbling, diving, like a duck parliament assembled against its will, but happily not possessed of a charter or political principles, and living out their days undisturbed by the guns of sportsmen, under the eyes of naturalists, who occasionally looked them over.

"Here is Monsieur Lavrille," said one of the janitors of the establishment to Raphael, who had asked to see the great pontiff of zoölogy.

The marquis now beheld a little man plunged in deep meditation over the study of a pair of ducks. This learned professor, who was of middle age, had a naturally gentle face, made still more kindly by an obliging manner; but the chief expression of his person was scientific preoccupation. His wig, perpetually scratched and shoved to one side, showed a line of white hair below it, and seemed to indicate a fury of research which, like all other passions, tears us so completely from the things of life, that we even lose the consciousness of this self. Raphael, a student and a man of science, admired the naturalist, whose days and nights were consecrated to the advancement of human knowledge, whose very errors might be said to be the glory of France; a fashionable lady, however, would have laughed at the solution of contiguity between the breeches and the striped waistcoat of the learned man, an interstice chastely filled up by a shirt con-

siderably rumpled by his exertions as he bent over, and kneeled down, and rose up at the mercy of his zoölogical investigations.

After a few opening remarks by way of courtesy, Raphael thought it only politic to pay Monsieur Lavrille a commonplace compliment upon his ducks.

"Oh, yes, we are rich in ducks," said the naturalist. "The genus is, as you are no doubt aware, the most prolific in the order of palmipeds. It begins with the *swan* and ends with the *zinzin* duck, and comprises one hundred and thirty-seven varieties of perfectly distinct individuals, all having their own name, their manners and customs, their habitation, their physiognomy, and no more resembling one another than we resemble negroes. In fact, monsieur, when we eat a duck we have little idea what that involves —" He interrupted himself to watch a pretty little creature that was waddling up the slope out of the pool. "You see there Buffon's cravatted goose, poor child of Canada, come from afar to show us his gray and brown plumage and his jaunty white neck-cloth. Look! he is scratching himself. There's the famous down goose, in other words, the Eider-duck, beneath whose quilts our ladies of fashion lie; is n't she pretty? Who would n't admire that blush-white breast of hers, and the green bill? I have just mated two species which I have long despaired of breeding from, and I await the result impatiently. I hope to obtain a hundred and thirty-eighth species, to which perhaps my name may be given. There they are," he said, pointing out two ducks. "One is the laughing goose (*anas albifrons*), the other is the great whistling duck (*anas rufina* of Buffon). I hesitated

long between the whistling duck, that duck with the white irides, and the shoveller-duck (*anas clypeata*). See, there's the shoveller, that big chestnut-brown fellow, with the glossy green throat so coquettishly iridescent. But the whistler was crested, monsieur, and you can easily understand that that carried the day. All we want to complete the collection is the variegated duck with a black cap. Our gentlemen are unanimous in declaring that duck to be only a hybrid of the teal, with a crooked bill. As for me — " He made a gesture equally expressive of the modesty and the pride of learning, — pride full of obstinacy, modesty replete with self-sufficiency, — " I don't think so. You see, my dear monsieur, we don't waste our time on amusements here. At this very moment I am busy with a monograph on the genus duck. But nevertheless I am at your service."

As they walked toward a rather pretty house in the rue de Buffon, Raphael produced the Magic Skin and showed it to Monsieur Lavrille.

" I know that product," said the man of science, after levelling his eye-glass on the talisman. " It is often used to cover cases. Shagreen is a very ancient article. In these days manufacturers prefer to use the skin of the *raja sephen*, which is, as you doubtless know, the shark of the Red Sea."

" But this, monsieur, if you will have the great kindness to — "

" This," said the learned man, interrupting Raphael, " is another thing altogether. Between the *raja sephen* and the *onagra* there is, I admit, all the difference that there is between earth and ocean, between fish and

quadruped. Nevertheless the fish-skin is harder than shagreen. This," he continued, fingering the talisman, "is, as you doubtless know, one of the most curious products of zoölogy."

"Explain it," said Raphael.

"In the first place," said the man of science, plunging into his armchair, "it is the skin of an ass."

"I know that," said the young man.

"There exists in Persia," resumed the naturalist, "an extremely rare ass, the onager of the ancients, *equus asinus*, the *koulan* of the Tartars. Pierre-Simon Pallas went to those regions to examine it; he gave it to science. Indeed, the animal had long been regarded as mythical or extinct. It is mentioned, as you know, in Holy Scripture; Moses forbade that it should breed with its congeners. But the wild ass is still more famous for its singular remedial properties, often alluded to by the Biblical prophets, and which Pallas himself mentions, as you doubtless remember, in his 'Act: Petrop,' volume II., where he says they are still accepted among the Persians and Afghans as a panacea for sciatic gout, and all diseases of the lumbar regions. We poor Frenchmen would be glad to know of that. The Museum does not possess a single onager. What a splendid animal!" cried the man of science. "Full of mystery! his eye is furnished with a species of reflector, to which the Orientals attribute a gift of fascination; his coat is more exquisitely shining than that of our best-groomed horses; it is striped with tawny lines, and bears a strong resemblance to the zebra. The animal's hair is soft and smooth, and unctuous to the touch; his sight is fully

equal in reach and precision to a man's; he is rather larger than our finest domestic ass, and possesses extraordinary courage. If by chance he is overtaken or surprised, he defends himself with remarkable intelligence against other wild beasts; as for the rapidity with which he moves, it can be compared only to the flight of birds. An onager, monsieur, can out-run the fleetest Arab or Persian horses. According to the father of the conscientious doctor, Niebuhr, whose recent death, as you doubtless know, we now deplore, the ordinary pace of these wonderful creatures is seven thousand geometric strides per hour. Our degenerate donkeys give no idea of this proud, daring animal. He is nimble in action, lively, intelligent, shrewd, graceful in appearance and in movement. He is, in fact, the zoölogical king of the East. Turkish and Persian superstitions both ascribe to him a mysterious origin, and the name of Solomon is mingled with the traditions that are current in Thibet and Tartary about the prowess of the noble animal. A tamed wild ass would be worth vast sums of money; it is nearly impossible to capture them among their mountain fastnesses, where they spring from rock to rock like goats, or seem to fly like birds. The fable of Pegasus, the winged horse, no doubt took its rise from them. The saddle asses, obtained in Persia by mating the female ass with a tamed onager, are dyed red according to immemorial tradition; and that custom is perhaps at the bottom of our proverb, 'Wicked as a red ass.' At an epoch when natural history was at a low ebb in France, some traveller must, I think, have brought back with him one of these curiously painted animals, who became

impatient in confinement, — hence the saying. The leather which you show me," continued the learned man, "is made from the skin of the wild ass. There is a difference of opinion as to the origin of its name, 'shagreen.' Some say that it comes from the Turkish word *Saghri*, signifying the rump of an ass; others insist that the same word is the name of a town, where the hide of the wild ass was first subjected to the chemical preparation so well described by Pallas, and which gives it the granulated surface we admire so much: but Monsieur Martellens writes me that *Sâaghri*, or *Châagri*, is a rivulet."

"Monsieur, I thank you for giving me all this information, which would furnish admirable notes to some Dom Calmet, if Benedictines still existed; but I have the honor to point out to you that this small piece of skin was, not long ago, as large as — that atlas," said Raphael, looking about him, "and for the last three months it has been visibly shrinking."

"Well, I understand that," said the man of science. "All remains of animal life, primitively organized, are liable to a natural decay, which is easy to comprehend, and the progress of which depends largely on atmospheric influences. Even metals expand or contract perceptibly; for engineers often notice considerable spaces between huge stones, held closely together originally by bands of iron. Science is vast, human life is short; therefore we can hardly hope to master all the phenomena of nature."

"Monsieur," said Raphael, rather bewildered, "excuse the inquiry I am about to make of you. Are you quite sure that this Skin comes under the general

laws of zoölogy; can it be stretched back to its former size?"

"Undoubtedly — Plague take it!" cried Monsieur Lavrille, vainly trying to stretch the talisman. "Monsieur," he added, "you had better go and see Planchette, the celebrated professor of mechanics; he can certainly find a way to act upon that Skin, to soften and distend it."

"Ah, monsieur, you save my life."

Raphael bowed to the wise man, and betook himself at once to Planchette, leaving Lavrille in a study filled with vials and dried plants. He brought away with him, unawares, the whole of human science, — a nomenclature! The worthy naturalist was like Sancho Panza relating the story of the goats to Don Quixote; he amused himself by counting the animals and numbering them. With one foot in the grave, he knew as yet only a tiny fraction of the incommensurable numbers of the great herds flung by God, for some mysterious purpose, across the lands and seas of the universe. Raphael, however, was satisfied.

"I can bridle my ass, now," he thought to himself. Sterne had said before him: "Spare your ass, if you would live to old age." But the beast is certainly an unaccountable one.

Planchette was a tall, lean man, a poet lost in perpetual contemplation of an abyss without a bottom, namely, MOTION. Ordinary persons cast the reproach of madness upon these glorious minds, these souls uncomprehended, who live in noble indifference to luxury and life, capable of smoking all day long an unlighted cigar, or of entering a salon without always marrying the

buttons of their garments to the buttonholes. Some day, after long sounding of the void, after piling up the X's under Aa — Gg, they find they have analyzed some natural law and decomposed the simplest of elements; then suddenly the world at large admires a new mechanism, or some vehicle of the understanding, whose facile construction amazes and confounds us. The modest man of science smiles and says to his admirers, —

"What, think you, I have created? Nothing. Man cannot invent a force; he directs it. Science consists in following nature."

Raphael came upon the mechanician, standing rigid on his two legs, like a man fallen plumb from a gibbet on which he has been hanged. He was watching a marble as it rolled over a sun-dial, and waiting anxiously till it stopped. The poor man was neither pensioned nor decorated, for he knew nothing about exhibiting his science. Happy in the quest of discovery, he thought of neither fame nor money, nor even of himself; he lived in science for the sake of science.

"Well, there 's no end to it," he cried, still watching the marble. Then noticing Raphael, he said, "Monsieur, I am your most obedient; how is the mamma? Go and see my wife."

"I could have lived that life," thought Raphael, who proceeded to draw the student from his reverie by showing him the Magic Skin, and asking to be told how to soften and distend it. "Though you may laugh at my credulity, monsieur," said the marquis, after stating the case, "I shall hide nothing from you. This Skin has, as I think, a power of resistance against which nothing can avail."

"Monsieur," said Planchette, "men of the world are apt to treat science cavalierly. They all say to us pretty much what the Incroyable said to Lalande when he escorted a lady to the observatory after the eclipse was over, — 'Will you have the goodness to begin again?' What effect are you seeking to produce? The end and aim of mechanics is to apply the laws of motion or to neutralize them. As to motion in itself, I declare to you with humility that we are powerless to define it. That acknowledged, we have discovered some of the unvarying phenomena which govern the action of fluids and solids. By reproducing the generating causes of those phenomena, we are able to move substances and transmit to them a locomotive power (up to a certain ratio of limited rapidity), to start their motion, to divide them simply or indefinitely, whether we break them or pulverize them. We can also twist them and produce rotary motion, modify, compress, dilate, or stretch them. This science rests on a single fact. You see that marble, monsieur. It is here on this stone; now it is over there. By what name shall we call that act so physically natural and so morally unaccountable? Motion, action, locomotion, change of place? What self-sufficiency is in those words? A name, — is that a solution? Yet it is the whole of science. Our machinery employs or decomposes that motion, action, fact. The slight phenomenon before you, brought to bear on solid masses, can blow up Paris. We increase speed by expending force, and force by expending speed. What are force and speed? Science is unable to reply, just as she is unable to create motion. Motion, of any kind, is an immense

power, and man has never invented powers. Power is one, like motion, which is indeed the essence of power. All things are motion. Thought is motion. Nature rests on motion. Death is a motion whose range is as yet little known to us. If God is eternal, we must believe that he is ever in motion; God is, perhaps, motion itself. Thus motion is as inexplicable as God, as profound, unlimited, incomprehensible, intangible. Who has ever handled, understood, or measured motion? We feel its effects without seeing it. We can even deny its existence, as we deny that of God. Where is it? where is it not? Whence comes it? What is the principle of it? Where will it end? It is everywhere around us; it presses upon us, and yet evades us! As a fact, it is evident; as an abstraction, it is obscure, being, as it is, cause and effect in one. It requires, as we do, space; and what is space? Motion alone reveals it to us; without motion it is merely a word devoid of meaning, an insoluble problem, like chaos, like creation, like the infinite. Motion defies human thought, and the only conception man is allowed to obtain of it is that he can never conceive of it. Between each of those points which that marble has successively occupied in space," continued the learned man; "there lies an abyss for human reason; into that abyss fell Pascal. To act upon an unknown substance, we must first study that substance; according to its own nature it will either break under a shock or resist it. If it breaks in two and your intention is not to divide it, we fail of the proposed end. Do you wish to compress it? You must transmit an equal motion to all parts of the substance, so as to diminish uniformly the

space that separates them. On the other hand, do you desire to stretch a substance? Then you must endeavor to give each molecule an equal eccentric force; for, unless that law is carefully observed, we shall produce solutions of continuity. There are, monsieur, an infinite number of methods and endless combinations in motion. What effect are you seeking?"

"Monsieur," said Raphael, impatiently, "I seek some method sufficiently powerful to stretch this Skin indefinitely."

"The substance being complete in itself," said the mathematician, "it cannot be indefinitely distended; pressure will, however, necessarily increase its surface size at the expense of its thickness; it will grow thinner and thinner until the substance fails —

"Obtain that result, monsieur," cried Raphael, "and you will have earned millions."

"I should simply steal your money," said the man of science, phlegmatic as a Dutchman. "I will show you in two words the existence of a machine under which the Creator himself would be crushed like a fly. It reduces man to the condition of a bit of blotting-paper; yes, a booted, spurred, cravatted man, gold, jewels, hat, and all, —"

"What a horrible machine!"

"Instead of flinging their children into the water, those Chinese ought to have utilized them in this very way," continued the man of science, without regard to man's respect for his progeny.

Absorbed in his idea, Planchette took an empty flower-pot with a hole in the bottom, and placed it on the sun-dial; then he fetched a small quantity of

clay from a corner of the garden. Raphael stood watching him like a child, charmed with some wonderful tale told by its nurse. Placing the clay upon the dial, Planchette drew a pruning-knife from his pocket, cut two branches of elder, and began to empty them, whistling to himself as though Raphael were not present.

"Here are the elements of the machine," he said.

He now fastened one of the wooden tubes at right angles to the bottom of the flower-pot with a portion of the clay, so that the hollow end of the elder branch corresponded with the hole in the flower-pot. The whole looked now like an enormous pipe. He then spread a layer of the clay on the sun-dial, shaping it in the form of a shovel, set the flower-pot on the widest part, and placed the branch of elder on the part representing the handle of the shovel. Next, he put a quantity of clay at the end of the elder-tube, and inserted the other tube again at right angles, making an elbow of the clay to join it firmly to the horizontal branch, so that the air, or any given ambient fluid, could circulate through the improvised machine from the opening of the vertical tube along the intermediary canal, into the empty flower-pot.

"Monsieur, this contrivance," he said to Raphael, with the gravity of an Academician pronouncing his initiatory discourse, "is one of the great Pascal's highest claims to reverence."

"I do not understand you."

The man of science smiled. He went to a fruit-tree and took down a little bottle (in which his apothecary had sent him a liquor to attract ants), broke off the

bottom of the vial and made a funnel of the rest, fitting it carefully to the open end of the vertical tube of elder, which brought it opposite to the grand reservoir represented by the flower-pot. Then from a garden watering-pot he poured in enough water to come equally to the edge of the reservoir, and to the little circular opening of the vertical tube. Raphael's thoughts wandered to his Magic Skin.

"Monsieur," said the mechanician, "water is supposed to be an incompressible substance; don't forget that fundamental principle; nevertheless, it does compress, but so slightly that its contractile faculty may be reckoned at zero. You see the surface of the water in the flower-pot?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Well, suppose that surface a thousand times larger than the orifice of the elder-tube through which I poured in the water. Stay, I will take off the funnel."

"I follow you."

"Well, monsieur, if I increase the liquid mass by pouring more water through the orifice of the little tube, the fluid, forced to go down, will rise up in the reservoir represented by the flower-pot until the liquid reaches the same level in each."

"That is evident," said Raphael.

"But there is this difference," resumed Planchette; "the thin column of water added to the small vertical tube presents a force equal, let us say, to a pound's weight, and as its action is faithfully transmitted to the liquid mass, and reacts on all points of the surface of the reservoir, there will inevitably be a thousand columns of water, all rising with a force equal to that

which sent down the fluid in the little vertical tube, and necessarily producing here," said Planchette, pointing to the opening of the flower-pot, "a force one thousand times as powerful as the force introduced there," pointing to the orifice of the tube.

"That is perfectly plain," said Raphael.

Planchette smiled.

"In other words," he resumed, with the tenacious logic of a mathematician, "we must, in order to repress the overflow of the water, bring to bear on all parts of the great surface a force equal to the force acting through the vertical conduit; but with this difference, that if the liquid column in it is only a foot high, the thousand little columns rising to the grand surface will have only a very feeble elevation. Now," continued Planchette, giving a flip to his sticks, "suppose we replace this absurd little apparatus by metallic tubes of suitable power and dimension; say that you cover with a strong movable plate the fluid surface of the reservoir, and upon that plate you place another whose strength and solidity will resist any strain; and then continue to add to the force of the liquid mass by ceaselessly pouring more water through the vertical tube. An object, whatever it is, held between the two metal plates must yield to the enormous force brought to bear upon it. The means of steadily introducing water through the little tube is a mere nothing in mechanics, and so is the method by which the force of the liquid mass is transmitted to the plates. Two pistons and a few valves are enough for that. You now see, monsieur," he said, taking Valentin's arm, "that there is no substance whatever which, if placed between

these resistant forces, will not be compelled to extend itself."

"What!" exclaimed Raphael, "did the author of the 'Provincial Letters' invent —"

"He himself, monsieur; and the science of mechanics knows nothing more simple or more beautiful. The opposite principle, namely, the expansion of water, created the steam-engine. But water is expansive to a certain degree only, whereas its non-compressibility being, as it were, a negative force, is necessarily permanent."

"If this Skin be extended," said Raphael, "I promise to erect a statue to Blaise Pascal, to found a prize of a hundred thousand francs for the finest discovery in mechanics within each decade, and to build a hospital for mathematicians who may become poor or crazy."

"That would all be very useful," said Planchette. "Monsieur," he resumed, with the tranquillity of a man living in a purely intellectual sphere; "I will take you to-morrow to Spieghalter. That distinguished mechanician has just constructed, from plans of mine, a perfected machine by which a child could put a thousand bales of hay into his hat."

"To-morrow, then, monsieur."

"To-morrow."

"Talk of mechanics!" thought Raphael, as he went away; "it is the noblest of sciences. The other man, with his onagers, his classifications, his species, and his vials full of monstrosities, is, at best, like the marker of a public billiard-table."

The next day Raphael returned full of hope to join Planchette, and together they went to the rue de la

Santé, name of good augury. The young man soon found himself at Spieghalter's vast establishment, surrounded by a number of roaring fiery furnaces. The place was filled as with a rain of fire, a deluge of nails, an ocean of pistons, screws, levers, crossbars, files, and nuts, a sea of castings, valves, and bars of steel. Filings choked the throat. Iron was in the atmosphere, men were covered with it, everything smelt of it; iron was alive, it was an organism, it became a fluid, it took a hundred forms, it walked, it thought, it obeyed a capricious will. Through the roar of the forges, the *crescendo* of the hammers, the hissing of the lathes, Raphael made his way to a large room which was clean and airy, where he could examine at his ease the immense hydraulic press which Planchette had mentioned. He admired the joists, if we may so call them, of cast-iron, and the iron side-beams held together by indestructible bolts.

"If you were to turn that crank seven times rapidly," Spieghalter said to him, pointing to a balance-wheel of polished iron, "you would grind a plate of steel into a thousand particles, which would enter your flesh like needles."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Raphael.

Planchette himself slipped the Magic Skin between the two metal plates of the great machine, and then, calm in the security given by scientific convictions, he quickly turned the crank.

"Lie down, lie down, or we are dead," cried Spieghalter, flinging himself flat on the ground.

A dreadful hissing echoed through the workrooms. The water contained in the machine burst the cast-iron,

and threw a jet of immense force, which fortunately struck an old piece of machinery, knocking it over, and twisting it out of shape like a house caught by a water-spout.

"Oh!" said Planchette, tranquilly, "that shagreen is still as sound as my eye. Master Spieghalter, there must have been a flaw in your cast-iron, or some interstice in the main tube."

"No, no, I know my own iron. Monsieur may take away that thing of his; the Devil is in it."

So saying, the German seized a blacksmith's hammer, flung the Skin upon an anvil and, with the strength of anger, struck the talisman a blow, the like of which had never before resounded in his workshops.

"It shows no mark of it!" cried Planchette, stroking the rebel Skin.

The workmen ran in. The foreman took the Skin and threw it among the live coal of the forge. All present ranged themselves in a half-circle round the fire, awaiting with impatience the result of a final and massive blow upon the strange substance. Raphael, Spieghalter, and Planchette, stood in the centre of the black and attentive crowd. Seeing those white eyes, those heads powdered with iron-filings, those grimy, shining garments, those hairy breasts, Raphael fancied himself transported to the weird nocturnal regions of German legends. The foreman seized the Skin with the tongs, after leaving it in the furnace for ten minutes.

"Give it to me," said Raphael.

The foreman held it out to him in jest. Raphael held it, cold and supple, in his fingers. A cry of

horror rose; the workmen fled. Valentin was left alone with Planchette in the deserted workshop.

"It is diabolic," said Raphael, in accents of despair. "No human power can save my life."

"Monsieur, I did wrong," said the mathematician in a contrite tone. "We ought to have submitted that extraordinary Skin to the action of a rolling-mill. How came I ever to have advised you to try compression?"

"I asked it of you myself," replied Raphael.

The man of science gave a sigh of relief, like that of a guilty man acquitted by a jury. Nevertheless, deeply interested by the strange problem of the Skin, he reflected a few moments, and then said: —

"This mysterious substance ought to be treated by reagents. Let us go and see Japhet; Chemistry may do more with it than Mechanics."

Valentin put his horse at speed, hoping to find the great chemist, Japhet, still at his laboratory.

"Well, my old friend," said Planchette, perceiving Baron Japhet in his armchair, watching a precipitate, "how is Chemistry going on?"

"Asleep. Nothing new. The Academy has, however, admitted the existence of salicine. But salicine, asparagine, glucin, and digitalin are not discoveries."

"You seem to be reduced to inventing names," said Raphael, "for lack of power to invent things."

"True, by heaven, young man!"

"Come," said Planchette to the chemist, "try to decompose this substance for us: if you can extract any sort of principle from it I'll call you Diabolus; for in trying to compress it we have just blown up an hydraulic press."

"Let me see it, let me see it!" cried the chemist joyfully, "it may be some undiscovered simple substance."

"Monsieur," said Raphael, "it is really nothing more than a piece of ass's skin."

"Monsieur?" said the chemist, gravely.

"I am not joking," said the marquis, giving him the Skin.

Baron Japhet applied the sensitive test of his tongue to the strange product; that tongue so capable of distinguishing salts, acids, alkalies, gases; and then he said, after a few attempts, —

"It has no taste. Well, I'll give it a bath of fluorine."

Subjected to the action of that element, which is quick to decompose animal tissues, the Skin underwent no change.

"It is not shagreen at all," cried the chemist. "Let us treat it as a mineral, and knock it in the head by putting it in a melting-pot, where I happen to have at this moment some red potassium."

Japhet left the room, but soon returned.

"Monsieur," he said to Raphael, "may I take a small piece of this strange substance? it is something very extraordinary."

"A piece!" cried Raphael, "no, not a hair's breadth; but you cannot if you would. Try," he added, in a tone that was half-sad, half-jeering.

The chemist broke a razor in his efforts to cut the Skin; then he tried to crack it by a strong shock of electricity; next he subjected it to the full force of a voltaic battery, until at last all the thunderbolts of

science had been fruitlessly launched against the dreadful talisman. It was seven o'clock in the evening. Planchette, Japhet, and Raphael, oblivious of the flight of time, were awaiting the result of a last experiment. The shagreen came out victorious from a terrible shock due to a certain quantity of chloride of nitrogen.

"I am a dead man!" cried Raphael. "The finger of God is in it. I must die."

He left the house without another word to the two men, who remained wonderstruck.

"We had better not say a word of this at the Academy; our colleagues would simply laugh at us," said Planchette to the chemist, after a tolerably long pause, during which they looked at each other without daring to communicate their thoughts. They were like Christian believers coming out of their tombs and finding no God in heaven. Science powerless! acids, pure water! red potassium dishonored! electricity and a voltaic pile no better than a cup and ball!

"An hydraulic press shattered like an egg-shell!" exclaimed Planchette.

"I believe in the Devil," said Baron Japhet, after a moment's silence.

"And I in God," responded Planchette.

The two spoke according to their lights. To a mechanician the universe is a machine, which implies a workman; but as for chemistry — that science of a devil who goes about decomposing everything, — to chemistry the world is nothing but a gas endowed with motion.

"We can't deny the fact," said the chemist.

"Bah! to console us, the dullards of the world have invented that nebulous maxim, 'Stupid as a fact.'"

With that they went off and dined together like men who saw only a phenomenon in a miracle.

By the time Valentin reached home he had fallen into a state of cold anger; he no longer believed in anything; his ideas were befogged in his brain, his thoughts reeled and vacillated like those of all other men in presence of an impossible fact. He had readily believed that there was some secret defect in Spieghalter's machine; the impotence of science and of fire surprised him little; but the suppleness of the Skin when he touched it, and its hardness against every means of destruction within the power of man, terrified him. That incontestable fact made his brain reel.

"I am mad," he thought. "Though I have eaten no food since morning, I am neither hungry nor thirsty, and yet flames are consuming me within."

He replaced the Magic Skin in the frame from which he had taken it, and after drawing another red line round the present outline of the talisman, he seated himself once more in his easy-chair.

"Already eight o'clock!" he said. "The day has gone like a dream."

He put his elbows on the arms of his chair, and leaned his head upon his left hand, giving himself up to funereal reflections, to those awful thoughts whose secret is carried to the grave by prisoners condemned to death.

"Oh, Pauline!" he cried aloud. "Poor child! there are gulfs which love cannot pass, no matter how strong its pinions." At this instant he distinctly heard a smothered sigh, and recognized, by a most touching privilege of passion, the breath of his Pauline. "Oh!"

he said, "it is my death-warrant. If she were here I would seek death in her arms."

A joyous ripple of laughter made him turn his head toward the bed, and he saw through its transparent curtains the sweet face of his wife, smiling like a happy child at a successful piece of mischief. Her beautiful hair fell in curls upon her shoulders; she looked like a Bengal rose on a mound of white roses.

"I coaxed Jonathas," she said. "Don't scold me, dearest; I could not sleep away from you. Forgive me my folly," and she sprang from the bed like a kitten, radiant in her clouds of muslin as she nestled on Raphael's knees. "What gulf were you talking of, dear love? she asked, an anxious expression crossing her brow.

"Of death," he answered.

"You hurt me," she said; "there are some thoughts on which we poor women cannot bear to dwell, — they kill us. Is it from force of love, or lack of courage? I know not. But death does not frighten me," she added, laughing. "To die with thee, to-morrow, together, in a last kiss — ah! it would be happiness! I should still have lived a hundred years. Why measure time by days and years, when in one hour we live a lifetime of peace and love?"

"Right, right," he said, "the heavens are speaking through thy pretty mouth; let me kiss it, and let me die."

"Let us die," she answered, laughing.

Toward nine o'clock in the morning, daylight was shining through the interstices of the outer blinds; softened by the muslin curtains it showed the rich

colors of the carpet and the silken coverings of the furniture, while touches of gilding sparkled here and there. A sunbeam quivered on the eider-down quilt which had slipped from the bed; hanging to a tall psyche-glass, the dress Pauline had taken off the night before looked like a misty apparition. Her tiny shoes were at some distance from the bed. The low warbling of a nightingale in a tree beside the window, and the whirr of his wings as he suddenly took flight, awakened Raphael.

"Death," he said, continuing a thought begun in a dream, "can only come if my organization, this mechanism of flesh and bones vitalized by my will, which makes me an individual man, undergoes some morbid change of structure or of functions. The doctors ought to know the symptoms of departing vitality; they can tell me if my state is health or disease."

He looked at his sleeping wife, whose arm was about his neck, still expressing, even in sleep, the tender anxieties of her love. Her attitude was graceful as that of an infant; she lay with her face toward him, and seemed to be still looking at him and putting up the pretty lips which were slightly parted by her pure and equable breathing; a smile flickered upon them, showing the white teeth that heightened their rosy freshness. The glow of her complexion was more vivid, and its whiteness, so to speak, more white at this moment than during all the loving hours of the day. The graceful, easy attitude, so full of confidence, added the adorable beauties of sleeping childhood to the charms of love. All women, even the most natural, obey in their waking hours certain social conventions which repress the native instincts of their soul;

but sleep seems to give them back the spontaneity of being which adorns infancy. Like one of those dear and celestial beings with whom the mind has forced no thought into the gestures, no secrets into the eyes, Pauline blushed at nothing. Her profile was clearly defined against the fine linen of the pillow-case; quillings of lace mingled with her straying hair and gave her a half-roguish look; but she had fallen asleep happy, and the long eyelashes lay upon her cheek as if to protect the eyes from too sudden an awakening, or to aid that composure of the soul which seeks to retain the memory of a perfect though fugitive happiness. To see her thus asleep, smiling in her dreams, peaceful under his protection, loving him even in a vision, wrapped in her love as in a mantle, chaste in the presence of disorder, was to a man like Raphael happiness unspeakable. He looked about the room surcharged with love and redolent of memories, where the sunlight was now brightening the glowing tints; then his eyes reverted to the woman beside him, young, loving, and pure, whose every feeling was his without alloy. Passionately he desired to live. His glance wakened her, and she opened her eyes as though a ray of sunshine had struck them.

"Good-morning, friend," she said, smiling. "Ah! how beautiful thou art!"

The two heads, glowing with a grace that came of love, of youth, of the soft half-lights and silence, made one of those divine pictures whose fleeting magic belongs to the earlier days of passion, just as artlessness and candor are the attributes of childhood. Alas! these spring-time joys of love, like the laughter of

youth, take wings and live in our memory only to drive us to despair, or shed some consoling fragrance upon our lives, according to the capricious changes of our secret thoughts.

"Why did you wake?" said Raphael. "It gave me such happiness to watch you sleeping, that I wept."

"And I, too," she answered. "I wept last night as I watched thee, but not with happiness. Listen to me, oh, my Raphael, listen! When asleep, thy breathing is not free and unconstrained; something sounds in thy chest which frightens me; that dry and hacking cough is like my father's, and he is dying of consumption. I fancy I hear in thy lungs the strange murmurings of disease. And you have fever, I am sure of it; last night your hand was moist and burning. My darling, thou art so young," she said, shuddering; "surely thou canst be cured, even if — but no, no," she exclaimed joyously, "there 's no fear; and if there were, that disease is contagious, the physicians say" — and she flung her arms around him, and breathed his breath in one of those firm kisses where two souls touch each other — "I do not wish to grow old," she said. "Let us die young, and go to heaven, together, our hands filled with flowers."

"Such thoughts come only to those who have health," answered Raphael, burying his hands in Pauline's hair; but a horrible fit of coughing seized him, — the deep-seated sonorous cough which seems to come from a coffin, terrifying its victims, and leaving them trembling and sweating after shaking their nerves, straining their spinal marrow, and sending a mysterious leaden heaviness through their veins. Raphael fell back, pale

and exhausted, like a man whose strength has been spent in some last effort. Pauline looked at him with staring eyes, widened by fear, and remained motionless, white, and silent.

"Let us talk no more nonsense, my angel," she said at length, trying to hide from Raphael the horrible presentiment that seized her.

She covered her face with her hands, for suddenly she beheld the hideous skeleton of DEATH. Raphael's head had grown livid and hollow, like a skull brought from a cemetery to assist the studies of science. Pauline recollected his exclamation of the night before, and said, as if to herself: —

"Yes, there are abysses which love cannot cross, — but it may bury itself in them."

A few days after this melancholy scene, Raphael was seated one morning in an armchair, surrounded by four physicians, who had placed him under the full light of a window, and were taking his pulse, feeling him all over, and questioning him with an appearance of interest. The patient sought to discover their secret thoughts, endeavoring to interpret each gesture, and the slightest frown that came upon their foreheads. This consultation was his last hope. These supreme judges were about to render a decree of life or death. He had called in the four greatest oracles of modern medicine, that he might wring from human science its utmost knowledge. Thanks to his money and to his name, the three systems between which the judgment of mankind fluctuated were here present. Three of these physicians brought with them the whole of medi-

cal philosophy, — representing in their persons the conflict between Spirituality, Analysis, and a certain sarcastic Eclecticism. The fourth physician was Horace Bianchon, a man full of promise and science, perhaps the most distinguished of the modern doctors; the wise and modest representative of the studious youth who prepare themselves to gather in the heritage of wisdom laid up, during the last fifty years, in the École de Paris, and who may perhaps produce the monumental work for which preceding centuries have gathered so much diverse material. He was the intimate friend of Rastignac and of Valentin; for the last few days he had attended the latter professionally, and was now helping him to answer the questions of the three professors, to whom he occasionally explained, with a certain insistence, the symptoms which, as he thought, betrayed pulmonary consumption.

"You have, no doubt, led a life of excess, and given yourself up to great efforts of mind?" said one of the doctors, whose square head, broad face, and vigorous organization seemed to show a genius superior to that of his antagonists.

"I have tried to kill myself by excess, after toiling for three years at a great work which may occupy your minds some of these days," answered Raphael.

The great man nodded his head with apparent satisfaction, as though he were saying to himself, "I was sure of it!"

This was the illustrious Brisset, chief among the "organists," and successor to the school of Cabanis and Bichat, the positive and materialistic school, which sees in man a finite being subject solely to the laws of

his own organization, whose normal state, or whose vitiated anomalies are explainable by natural causes.

On receiving Raphael's reply, Brisset glanced silently at a man of medium height, whose crimson face and ardent eye seemed to belong to some antique faun. Leaning against the window-casing, he was observing Raphael attentively, without saying a word. Doctor Cameristus, chief of the "vitalists," a man of exalted feelings and beliefs, a poetic defender of the abstract theories of Van Helmont, considered human life a lofty, secret essence, an inexplicable phenomenon which laughs at scalpels, deceives surgery, evades the drugs of the pharmacopœia, the x of algebra, the laws of anatomy, and scoffs at Science; a species of invisible, intangible flame, subject to some divine law, and which often remains living in a human body condemned by the decrees of doctors, while as often it deserts organizations that seem to be full of life.

A sardonic smile curled the lips of the third physician, Doctor Maugredie, a man of distinguished intellect, but pyrrhonic and a scoffer, who believed in nothing but the knife, conceded to Brisset that a man could die who was perfectly well, and agreed with Cameristus that a man might live even though he were dead. He saw something true in all theories and adopted none, declaring that the best medical system was to have no doctrines and to rely only on facts. This Panurge of his school, king among observers, the great investigator and scoffer, the man of heroic methods, took up the shagreen talisman and examined it.

"I should like to witness the phenomenon you speak

of, — the coinciding of your desires with the shrinking of the leather," he said to the marquis.

"What help would that be?" cried Brisset.

"What help indeed?" echoed Cameristus.

"Ah! you agree for once," said Maugredie.

"The contraction is perfectly simple," added Brisset.

"It is supernatural," said Cameristus.

"The truth is," said Maugredie, assuming a serious look and handing the Magic Skin to Raphael, "the shrinking of leather is an inexplicable fact, at the same time a natural one, which from the dawn of ages has been the despair of surgery and of pretty women."

Valentin, eagerly watching the three doctors, was forced to perceive that they felt not the slightest sympathy for his sufferings. All three kept silence when he answered them; looked at him coldly, and questioned him without compassion. Even their politeness was nonchalant. Whether their minds were made up, or whether they were still reflecting, their words were so few, their manner so lethargic, that Raphael thought them at times absent-minded. Brisset alone said, occasionally, "Very well, very good," in reply to Bianchon's proofs of the more alarming symptoms. Cameristus was plunged in his own thoughts. Maugredie was like a comic actor studying a pair of originals to produce them faithfully on the stage. The face of Horace Bianchon alone betrayed concern, even a tender pity that was full of sadness. He had practised his profession too short a time to be indifferent to the sufferings of a dying man, or to restrain the friendly tears that dimmed his eyes.

After spending perhaps half an hour in taking the

measure, as it were, of the sick man and his disease, as a tailor takes the measure of a young man for his wedding suit, they began to talk of ordinary matters, even politics, and soon after proposed to adjourn to Raphael's study for consultation.

"Gentlemen," said Raphael, "may I be present?"

Brisset and Maugredie exclaimed vehemently against the request, and in spite of the patient's insistence declared they would not consult in his presence. Raphael submitted to their etiquette, recollecting that he could slip into a side-passage and overhear their discussions.

"Gentlemen," said Brisset, as they entered the study, "let me give you my opinion at once. I neither wish to impose it upon you nor to make it a subject of controversy. It is clear, precise, and founded on the exact similarity of this case with that of another patient of mine; moreover, I am much pressed for time, being wanted at my hospital. The importance of the operation which I am to perform must be my excuse for thus seizing the first word. The case we are now considering is worn out, as much by intellectual labor — by the bye, Horace," he said, interrupting himself to question the young physician, "what has he written?"

"A theory on the Will."

"The devil! well, that 's a wide subject. He is worn out, I say, not only by excess in thought, but by excesses of conduct and the repeated use of powerful stimulants. The violent action of brain and body thus induced has vitiated all the functions of the organism. It is easy to recognize in the visible symptoms of the face and body a tremendous irritation of the stomach, the neurotic condition of a high-strung temperament, a

sensitiveness of the epigastrium, and the contractions of hypochondria. You noticed, of course, the size and prominence of the liver. Monsieur Bianchon has watched the patient's digestion, and says it is slow and labored. Properly speaking, there is no longer a stomach; the *man* has practically disappeared. The intellect is atrophied because the stomach no longer digests. The progressive deterioration of the epigastrium, the centre of life, has broken up the whole system; it reaches every part of the organism, more specially the brain through the nerve currents; hence the excessive irritation of that organ. In fact, there is monomania. The patient is under the influence of a fixed idea. To him that Skin really appears to shrink; though very likely it has always been just as we see it now. But whether it contracts or not, that bit of shagreen is to him like the fly the grand vizier had on his nose. Put leeches on the epigastrium at once; calm the irritation of that organ, in which the whole life of man resides. Keep the patient to a strict diet, and monomania will cease. I have nothing more to say to Doctor Bianchon; he is quite competent to seize the idea and carry out the treatment. Perhaps there may be some complications; the respiratory passages may be irritated, but I think the treatment of the intestinal organs far more important, and more urgent than that of the lungs. Close study on abstract subjects and a few violent passions have produced this serious disturbance of the vital forces. However, there is still time to mend the springs and set the machine going again; the harm done is not past remedy. You can easily save your friend," he added, turning to Bianchon.

"Our learned colleague mistakes effects for causes," answered Cameristus. "Yes, the deteriorations he has noticed have taken place; but the stomach has not gradually and systematically vitiated the whole organism together with the brain, like the spreading of a crack in a pane of glass. Some original shock was needed to make the crack; what was it? what gave it? do any of us know? have we studied the patient long enough to know? Gentlemen, the vital principle, Van Helmont's *archeus*, is attacked in this man; vitality itself is attacked at its source, in its essence. The divine spark, the fleeting intelligence which holds the machinery together and produces will, the science of life, has ceased to control the daily phenomena of this human mechanism and the functions of each organ. Hence the disorders so well diagnosed by my learned associate. The deteriorating action did not pass from the stomach to the brain, but from the brain to the stomach. No," he said, striking his own body forcibly, "I'm not a stomach made into a man! No, that's not the whole of me. I have not the courage to declare that if I have a sound epigastrium everything else must be right with me. We cannot," he continued, in a gentler tone, "refer to one and the same physical cause, and put under uniform treatment, the serious disorders which are found in varying cases, more or less seriously attacked. No man is like another man. We all have our own particular organs, diversely affected, diversely nourished, fitted for various missions, and intended to carry out an order of things which is to us unknown. The fraction of the great All which by some higher will works within us the phenomenon called *life*, is formulated in a distinct

manner in each human being, making him apparently a finite being, but at one point co-existent with the Infinite. Therefore, we must study each case separately, penetrate its individual nature, recognize what *in it* is life, what its own peculiar power. Between the softness of a wet sponge and the hardness of pumice-stone there are many gradations. Such is Man. Between the spongy organisms of the lymphatics and the metallic vigor in the muscles of some men destined to live long, what mistakes may not be committed by the iron-bound implacable system of cure by depression, by the prostration of human forces which you choose to suppose irritated. In this case I should seek a mental and moral treatment, a searching examination of the inner being. Seek for causes in the entrails of the soul, not in those of the body! A physician should be an inspired being, gifted with a genius all his own, — one to whom God confides the power of reading the vital nature, just as he gave to his prophets the eyes to see into futurity, to his poets the faculty of evoking nature, to his musicians that of arranging sounds in harmonious sequence, whose type is perhaps on high!"

"Pure absolutism, monarchy, religion, — that's his science of medicine!" muttered Brisset.

"Gentlemen," said Maugredie, hastily, smothering Brisset's remark, "don't let us lose sight of our sick man, —"

"This is Science!" thought Raphael, sadly. "My cure hangs between a rosary and a chaplet of leeches, between the scalpel of Dupuytren and a prayer of the Prince of Hohenlohe! On the dividing-line between word and deed, matter and spirit, stands Maugredie,

scoffing! The human *yes* and *no* pursue me. Always and forever the *Carymary, Carymara* of Rabelais. I am spiritually ill, *carymary!* or materially ill, *carymara!* Am I to live? They ignore that. Planchette at least had more honesty; he said frankly, 'I don't know.'"

At this moment, Valentin distinguished the voice of Doctor Maugredie.

"The patient is a monomaniac, — well, I agree to that," he cried; "but he has two hundred thousand francs a year. Such monomaniacs are rare, and we owe them at least our best advice. As to knowing whether his epigastrium acts on his brain or his brain on his epigastrium, we can settle that when he is dead. But let us look at the immediate facts. He is ill, that's very certain. He must have some treatment. Never mind theories. Put on leeches if you will to quiet the intestinal irritation and the nervous condition, about which we are all agreed; then let us send him off to some Baths. This will meet both systems. If he is consumptive, we can't save him, and so — "

Raphael left the passage and returned to his arm-chair. The four physicians presently re-entered his room. Horace Bianchon was deputed to speak to him, and said: —

"These gentlemen have unanimously decided on an immediate application of leeches to the stomach, and the urgent necessity of a treatment that shall be both physical and moral. In the first place, a dietetic regimen is prescribed to quiet the irritation of your organism — "

Brisset made a sign of approval.

"In the second, a hygienic treatment to give tone to

your mental and moral condition. Therefore, we unanimously advise you to go to Aix-les-bains in Savoie or to the baths of the Mont Dore in Auvergne, — either you prefer; the air and the scenery of Savoie are more agreeable than those of the Cantal, but we wish you to please yourself."

Here Doctor Cameristus gave signs of assent.

"These gentlemen," continued Bianchon, "having found some slight lesions in the respiratory organs, are quite agreed in approving my treatment of your case, so far. They think that your cure can easily be effected, and will depend on the judicious and alternate use of these two methods. And — "

"This is why your science is mute," said Raphael, taking Bianchon into his study and giving him the price of the useless consultation.

"They are logical," said the young physician. "Cameristus feels, Brisset examines, Maugredie doubts; has n't man a soul, a body, a mind? One or other of those three first causes acts more or less powerfully within us; there will always be a man behind all scientific convictions. Believe me, Raphael, we cannot cure; we only aid a cure. Between the science of Brisset and the science of Cameristus stands Expectant science; but to practise it successfully we must know a patient ten years. There 's negation at the bottom of medicine just as there is in every science. Try to live prudently; make a journey to Savoie; it is best, and always will be best, to trust to nature."

On a fine morning, about a month later, several visitors to the Baths of Aix, returning from their usual

promenade, met together in one of the salons of the Cercle. Sitting by an open window with his back to the company, Raphael remained isolated, plunged in one of those mechanical reveries in which our thoughts arise, link with each other, and vanish away taking no actual shape, passing through us, as it were, like fleeting clouds that are scarcely tinted. At such moments sadness is tender, joy is shadowy, and the soul is all but sleeping. Raphael, yielding to this sensuous existence, drank in the pure and balmy air of the mountains, and bathed in the warm atmosphere of the summer evening, happy in feeling no pain and in having at length reduced to silence the fatal talisman. Just as the last red tints of the setting sun were fading from the summits, the temperature grew chilly, and he closed the window.

"Monsieur," said an old lady, "will you have the kindness not to shut that window. We are suffocating."

The speech jarred on Raphael's sensitive ears with peculiar sharpness; it was like an imprudent word dropped by a friend in whom we wish to believe, and who destroys some sweet illusion of feeling by the betrayal of an inward selfishness. He cast the chilling look of a diplomatist upon the lady who addressed him, then he called up a waiter and said to him dryly: —

"Open that window."

A look of amazement appeared on every face. The company began to whisper in low tones and to look at the sick man significantly, as if he had been guilty of a great impertinence. Raphael, who had never shaken off his natural shyness, felt abashed; but he resolutely

came out of his torpor, recovered the energy of his mind, and asked himself the meaning of the strange scene. Suddenly and strangely a rapid action took place in his mind; the past appeared to him in a vision where the causes of the feeling he inspired sprang into relief like the veins of a dead body when some naturalist colors it to a semblance of life with a chemical injection. He recognized his own being in the fleeting picture; followed his existence day by day and thought by thought; he saw himself, not without surprise, gloomy and absorbed in the midst of the merry world, thinking only of his own destiny, preoccupied with his own griefs, disdaining even the most trifling intercourse with others, refusing those ephemeral intimacies that are quickly formed among persons who know they are not likely to meet again, thoughtless of others, like rocks as indifferent to the soft lapping of the waves as to their fury. Then, by a rare privilege of intuition, he read the souls of others; he saw by the light of that inward torch the yellow skull, the sardonic profile of an old man whose money he had won without allowing him to take his revenge; he saw a pretty woman to whose advances he had turned the cold shoulder; every face in his vision reproached him for some ostensible injury, whose real crime lay in the invisible stabs he had given to self-love. Involuntarily he had wounded all the little vanities which gravitated round him.

Sounding thus the hearts of others, he deciphered their secret thoughts; he conceived a horror of society, its hollow politeness, its thin varnish. Rich and mentally superior, he saw himself both envied and hated; his silence baffled curiosity; his reserve seemed haugh-

tiness to the petty and superficial beings about him; his keen perception enabled him to guess the latent unforgivable wrong of which he was guilty toward them, — he escaped the jurisdiction of their mediocrity. Rebelling against their inquisitorial despotism, he showed he could live without them; and to avenge themselves for that regal assumption they instinctively banded together to make him feel their power, to ostracize him, and let him know that they too could do without him. At first he was filled with pity at this aspect of the world; then he shuddered as he thought of the supple power which thus enabled him to lift the veil of flesh that hides our diseased nature; and he closed his eyes as if to see no more. A black pall fell upon that sinister phantasmagoria of truth, and he felt himself alone in the horrible isolation that belongs to power.

At this moment he was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and he heard, in place of the usual conventional sympathy, a hostile murmur, and a few complaints uttered in a low voice. Society no longer wore the veil of politeness, possibly because it was aware that he knew it too well.

"His disease is contagious."

"The president of the Cercle ought to forbid his coming here."

"Decency requires that no one shall cough in that way."

"Any man as ill as he ought not to come to the Baths. He will drive me, for one, out of the place."

Raphael rose to escape the general ill-will, and walked about the rooms. He looked for some friendly support, and presently approached a lady who seemed

unoccupied, intending to address her with a few compliments. But as he came near she turned her back, and pretended to be watching the dancers. Raphael dreaded lest this fatal evening had used up some of his talisman; feeling neither the will nor the courage to make any further attempt at conversation, he left the salon hastily, and took refuge in the billiard-room. There no one spoke or even bowed to him. His naturally meditative mind showed him by an intussusception the general and rational cause of the aversion he inspired. This little world at the Baths obeyed, perhaps without knowing it, the great law which regulates high society, whose implacable code had already fully developed to Raphael's eyes. A backward glance showed him its type in Fedora. Neither in the one nor in the other could he ever have found sympathy for his sufferings, or comprehension for his heart. The great world banishes the sufferer from its midst, just as a man in vigorous health expels some morbid element from his body. Society abhors sorrows and the sorrowful, hates them like a contagion, and never hesitates in its choice between them and vice, — vice is luxury. No matter how majestic grief may be, society knows how to belittle it, and to ridicule it with a witticism; it draws caricatures and flings them at the heads of dethroned monarchs in return for affronts it fancies it has received. Like the young Romans of the Circus, society has no mercy for the dying gladiator; it battens on gold, it lives by cruel mockery. "Death to the weak," is the cry of that equestrian order which exists among all the nations upon earth; and the sentence is written on hearts that are sodden in opulence or swollen by aris-

tocracy. Look at the children in a college school; behold there a miniature image of society, all the more true because it is artless and honest. See those poor helots, creatures of pain and mortification, placed between contempt and pity; the gospel tells such as they of heaven! Go a little lower in the scale of organized beings. If a fowl falls sick in a poultry-yard, all the others peck at it, pluck out its feathers, and finally kill it. Faithful to its code of selfishness, the world punishes sorrows that dare to invade its feasts and dim its pleasures. Whoever suffers in body or soul, or lacks power and money, is a pariah in society. Let him stay in his own desert; if he crosses the borders of it he enters arctic regions, he encounters cold looks, cold manners, cold hearts; he is fortunate if he escapes insult in places where he ought to look for consolation. Stay on your deserted beds, ye dying! Old men, live alone beside your smouldering hearths! Poor portionless girls, freeze or burn in your solitary chambers! If the world tolerates a misfortune, it is that it may fashion it to its own uses, find some profit in it, saddle it, bit it, put a pack upon its back, and make it serve a purpose. Trembling companion of some old countess, look gay! bear the whimsies of your pretended benefactress, carry her poodle, amuse her, fathom her, but be silent. And you, king of valets out of livery, impudent parasite, leave your character behind you; feed with your amphitryon, weep with his tears, laugh with his laughter, and call his witticisms wit; if you want to deny his virtues, wait till he falls. No, the world never honors misfortune; it drives it away, reviles, chastises, or kills it.

These reflections rose in Raphael's mind with the suddenness of poetic inspiration. He looked about him, and felt the frigid atmosphere which society diffuses to drive emotion away from it, — an atmosphere which chills the soul more sharply than the north wind of December chills the body. Raphael crossed his arms and leaned against the wall, giving way to deepest melancholy. He thought of the small amount of happiness this system of society procured for it. *What was it all?* — amusements without pleasure, gayety without joy, fêtes without charm, sensuality without the enjoyments of the soul; in short, the ashes of the hearth without a ray of flame.

When he raised his head he saw that he was alone; even the players had left his presence.

"I could make them worship my cough if I showed them my fatal power," he said to himself. As the thought crossed his mind, contempt, like a mantle, wrapped him from the world.

On the morrow, the physician of the Baths came to him and inquired with much courtesy as to his health. Raphael felt an emotion of joy as he listened to the friendly words. The doctor's face was instinct with kindliness, the curls of his blond wig expressed philanthropy; the cut of his square coat, the folds of his trousers, his shoes, which were broad as a Quaker's, all these things, even the powder shed from a little pigtail on his slightly bent shoulders, bespoke the apostolic nature, expressed Christian charity and the self-devotion of a man who, out of zeal for his patients, had brought himself to playing whist and trictrac well enough to win their money.

"Monsieur le marquis," he said, after talking some time on indifferent subjects, "I believe I can dissipate your sadness. I have watched your condition long enough to declare that the Parisian doctors, whose great genius I admire, are nevertheless mistaken as to the nature of your malady. Unless reduced by some unforeseen circumstances, Monsieur le marquis, you have vitality enough to live to the age of Methusaleh. Your lungs are as strong as a blacksmith's bellows, and your stomach might shame an ostrich. Nevertheless, if you remain in a mountainous atmosphere, you certainly risk your life. Monsieur le marquis will understand me when I explain my meaning, which I will do in few words. Chemistry proves that respiration is an actual combustion of more or less intensity, according to the excess or deficiency of the phlogistic elements collected in the organism of each individual man. In you the phlogistic, that is, the inflammatory tendency abounds. You are, if I may so express it, over-oxygenated by the ardent nature which belongs to men who are destined to great emotions. By breathing the keen, pure air which stimulates life in men of phlegmatic fibre, you increase your tendency to rapid combustion. One of the conditions of your recovery is to live in the atmosphere of low regions, valleys. Yes, the vital air of the man of genius is among the rich pasturages of Germany, at Baden-Baden, or Töplitz. If you have no dislike of England, her foggy climate would calm your natural fever. But our baths, which are over one thousand feet above sea-level, will prove fatal to you. At any rate, that is my opinion," he added, with a modest gesture, "and I give it against my own interests,

because, if you follow it, we shall have the misfortune of losing you."

Had he omitted those last words, Raphael would have been deceived by the false kindliness of the specious doctor; but he was too good an observer not to notice the tone, the gesture, and the glance which unconsciously accompanied the last sentence of a mission which had no doubt been intrusted to him by a number of his more cheerful patients. Florid men of leisure, wearied-out old women, wandering British tourists, and fashionable women escaping from their husbands and joined at the Baths by their lovers, were all banded together to drive away the pale and feeble dying man who was evidently incapable of resisting their daily persecution. Raphael accepted the struggle, and even foresaw some amusement in it.

"If my departure would disappoint you," he replied, "I think I can take advantage of your good advice, and yet remain here. To-morrow I will begin to build a house in which the air can be regulated to meet your prescription."

Rightly interpreting the sarcastic smile which he saw on Raphael's lips, the doctor bowed and went away without saying another word.

The lake of Bourget is a vast cup of mountains notched at intervals, in whose depths, six or seven hundred feet above the Mediterranean, shines a drop of water bluer than any other water in the world. Seen from the summit of the Dent-du-Chat, the lake lies there like a lost turquoise. This lovely sheet of water is twenty-three miles in circumference, and in some places nearly

five hundred feet in depth. To float upon its glassy surface beneath a cloudless sky, to hear only the rhythm of the oars, to see nothing but the misty mountains or the sparkling snows of the French Maurienne, to glide by granite cliffs, velvet-clothed with lichen, fern, and low-growing shrubbery, and then past smiling hillsides, — on one side a desert, on the other, nature's best riches; like to a pauper standing beside the dinner of opulence, — such harmonies and such contrasts compose a scene where all is grand and much is lovely. Mountains change the conditions of optical effects; a fir-tree rising a hundred feet looks like a reed, broad valleys seem as narrow as footways. This lake is the only one where heart can speak to heart in confidence. Here we may think, here we may love. In no other spot on earth can you find so exquisite a unison of water and sky, mountains and valley. Here may be found a balm for every ordeal of life. The peaceful region hides the secrets of grief, soothes, consoles, and lessens it, and gives to love a gravity, a composure, which renders passion purer and even deeper; here a kiss is magnified. But, above all, it is the lake of memories; they take the color of its waves in whose bright mirror all things are reflected. Raphael could bear his burden here, and only here; surrounded by this calm landscape, he could be indolent, and dreamy, and without desires.

After the doctor's visit he went out upon the lake, and made the boatman land him on a lonely point, at the foot of a pretty hill on which the village of Saint-Innocent is situated. From this tongue of land the eye takes in the Mont de Bugey, around whose feet

flows the Rhone and the lower waters of the lake; but Raphael loved best to contemplate from this point the melancholy abbey of Haute-Combe, the burial-place of the kings of Sardinia, situated on the opposite shore, and seeming to make obeisance before the mountains, like a palmer attaining the end of his pilgrimage. At this moment the cadenced beat of oars disturbed the stillness of the scene, and gave it a monotonous voice like the psalmody of monks. Surprised to encounter visitors in this usually deserted part of the lake, the marquis examined, but without coming out of his revery, the persons seated in the passing boat, and saw that one was the old lady who had so sharply interfered with him the night before. As the boat passed him, Raphael noticed that the *dame de compagnie* of the lady, a poor old maid of noble family, bowed to him.

He had already forgotten the incident, as the boat disappeared behind the promontory, when he heard close beside him the rustle of a dress, and the sound of a light step. Turning, he saw the poor companion, and judging from her nervous manner that she wished to speak to him, he advanced toward her. She was about thirty-six years old, tall and thin, cold and hard; and like all old maids, who are usually embarrassed to know which way to look, her gait was undecided, constrained, and without elasticity. Neither young nor old, and yet both, she expressed by a certain dignity of manner the high estimate which she put upon her qualities and perfections. She had, moreover, the discreet and monastic gestures of women who habitually take care of themselves, doubtless that they may not be found wanting for their destiny of love.

"Monsieur, your life is in danger; do not enter the salons again," she said to Raphael, taking a few steps backward, as if her virtue were already compromised.

"But, mademoiselle," answered Raphael, smiling, "will you not kindly explain yourself, since you have deigned to come here —"

"Ah!" she said, "without the powerful motive that has brought me, I should not have dared to risk the anger of Madame la comtesse, for if she knew that I had warned you —"

"Who should tell her, mademoiselle?" cried Raphael.

"True," said the old maid, with the blinking glance of an owl in the sunlight. "Think of your safety," she continued; "several young men are determined to drive you away; they mean to insult you, and force you to fight a duel."

The voice of the old countess was heard in the distance.

"Mademoiselle," said the marquis, "my gratitude —" His protectress had already left him at the sound of her mistress's voice, which continued to screech beyond the rocks.

"Poor girl! misery understands misery and tries to succor it," thought Raphael, sitting down under a tree.

The key to all science is, undoubtedly, the note of interrogation; we owe most of our great discoveries to the word "How?" and the wisdom of life consists in asking ourselves at every turn, "Why?" This second-hand prescience destroys our illusions, however. And so, Valentin, having taken, without intending to philosophize, the kind deed of the old maid as a text for his rambling thoughts, suddenly found it full of bitterness.

"That an old *dame de compagnie* should fancy me," he thought, "is nothing extraordinary; I am twenty-seven years old, titled, and rich. But that her mistress, that woman with a voice like the roof-cats, should have brought her here in a boat at this time of day, is something surprising, if not marvellous. Those women came to Savoie to sleep like marmots, expecting sunrise at mid-day, and here they are getting up at eight o'clock in the morning, and setting out in pursuit of me."

But before long the old maid and her quadragenary frankness struck him as only another scene in the artful and malicious play of life, — a low trick, a clumsy plot, a manœuvre of priests and women. Was the duel an invention, simply intended to frighten him away? Insolent and irritating as flies, these narrow minds had succeeded in pricking his vanity, rousing his pride, and exciting his curiosity. Determined not to be their dupe, nor to be thought a coward, and amused, it may be, at the little drama, he went to the Assembly rooms that evening. As he stood erect and tranquil, with his elbow on the marble chimney-piece of the principal salon, he examined the faces of those who passed him, and challenged, as it were, the whole company. Like a bull-dog sure of his own strength, he awaited the fight without barking.

Toward the end of the evening he walked up and down the card-room, casting an occasional glance at the young men who were playing in the billiard-room. After a while he heard one of the latter mention his name. Though their voices were low, Raphael easily perceived he was the theme of an argument, and finally of a wager. "Will you bet?" "Oh, yes, we can drive him

away." At this moment, when Valentin, curious to know the exact meaning of the wager, entered the billiard-room, a tall, young man with an agreeable face came up to him.

"Monsieur," he said in a quiet tone, "I am commissioned to tell you something which you appear to ignore. Your face and person are not agreeable to the society of this place, and to me in particular. You are too polite not to sacrifice yourself for the general good, and I request you not to appear here again."

"Monsieur, this joke, which was perpetrated many times under the Empire in various garrisons, is now extremely ill-bred," said Raphael, coldly.

"I am not joking," replied the young man. "I repeat what I said; your health will suffer seriously if you stay here any longer. The heat, the lights, the atmosphere of these rooms will develop your malady."

"Where did you study medicine?" asked Raphael.

"Monsieur, I graduated from Lepage's pistol-gallery in Paris, and took my degree of doctor from Cérizier, prince of foils."

"You have still another grade to win," replied Valentin; "study the code of civility and you will be a perfect gentleman."

At these words, all the young men present crowded round them, silent and smiling. The card-players left their game and listened to the quarrel with satisfaction. Alone, in the midst of this hostile company, Raphael tried to maintain his self-possession, and to give no ground of offence; but his antagonist having uttered a sarcasm the insolence of which was wrapped in peculiarly incisive and witty language, he answered deliberately: —

"Monsieur, it is not permissible in these days to box a man's ears, and I do not know with what words to brand your cowardly conduct."

"Enough! enough! you can explain to-morrow," cried several young men, flinging themselves between the antagonists.

Raphael left the room, apparently the aggressor, having agreed on a meeting the following day, in a small meadow near the château de Bordeau and not far from the main road to Lyons, along which the conqueror could readily escape.

The next morning by eight o'clock Raphael's adversary, the two seconds, and a surgeon arrived on the ground.

"We shall do very well here, — splendid weather for a duel," cried the young man gayly, looking at the blue sky, the water of the lake, and the mountains, without a thought of death. "If I can wing him, I shall put him to bed for a month; hey, doctor?"

"At the very least," replied the surgeon. "But don't twist that willow-branch; you will tire your hand and not fire steady; in that case you might kill your man instead of wounding him."

The roll of a carriage was heard.

"Here he comes," said the seconds, who soon made out on the high road a travelling-carriage drawn by four horses managed by two postilions.

"What an odd fellow," cried Valentin's adversary; "he comes in fine style to be killed."

A duel is like a game; the slightest incident affects the mind of players who are strongly interested in the success of a throw; and the young man certainly

awaited the approach of the carriage with some uneasiness. Old Jonathas first emerged clumsily, and then turned to assist Raphael. He supported him in his feeble arms with all the minute care a lover bestows on his mistress. Both disappeared in the shrubbery which separated the road from the meadow, and came in sight after some delay; they were seen to be walking slowly. The four spectators of this strange scene were conscious of some emotion when they saw Raphael leaning heavily on the servant's arm. Pale and unstrung, he walked like a gouty man, and did not utter a word. They seemed like a pair of broken-down old men, — one broken by time, the other by thought; the age of the first was written on his white hairs, but the younger man was no longer of any age.

"Monsieur, I have not slept all night," said Raphael to his adversary.

The icy tone and terrible glance which accompanied the words made the real aggressor tremble; he was conscious of being the one to blame, and he felt a secret shame at his conduct. In Raphael's whole attitude, voice, and gesture, there was something unnatural. The marquis paused; every one was silent; the attention and the uneasiness of all present was at its height.

"There is still time," said Valentin slowly, "to make me some slight apology; give it to me, monsieur; if not you must die. You are reckoning on your prowess; you do not shrink from a combat in which, as you believe, all the advantage lies on your side. Well, I am generous; I warn you of my superiority. I possess a terrible power. I can neutralize your

science, bewilder your eyes, make your hands tremble and your heart beat by a mere wish. I do not wish to exercise this power, it costs me too dear. If I use it, you will not be the only one to die. Should you refuse to make me this apology, your ball will glance aside in the water of that cascade in spite of your duelling-practice, and mine will go straight to your heart, though I shall take no aim."

As he said these words the marquis kept the intolerable brightness of his eye steadily fixed on his adversary; he straightened himself up, and now showed an impassive face, like that of a dangerous madman.

"Silence him," said the young man to his second, "his voice wrings my very entrails."

"Monsieur, be silent. Your remarks are useless," cried the surgeon and the second together.

"Gentlemen, I fulfil a duty. Has this young man any affairs to settle?"

"Enough, enough!"

The marquis stood motionless, without taking his eye for one instant from his adversary, who, apparently under the influence of some magnetic power, seemed like a bird before a snake. Compelled to endure that homicidal glance, he tried to avoid it, but was unable to do so.

"Give me some water, I am thirsty," he said to his second.

"Are you nervous?"

"Yes," he answered, "the burning eye of that man casts a spell upon me."

"Will you apologize?"

"It is too late."

The adversaries were placed at fifteen paces from each other. Each took his pistol; according to the rules of the ceremony, each was to fire two shots when and how he pleased after the seconds had given the signal.

"What are you doing, Charles?" cried the young man who was acting as second to Raphael's antagonist. "You are putting in the ball before the powder."

"I am a dead man," he answered; "you have put me with my face to the sun."

"The sun is behind you," said Valentin, in a solemn voice, slowly loading his pistol and paying no attention to the fact that the signal was already given, nor to the care with which his adversary adjusted his aim.

There was something terrifying about this easy assurance, which affected even the two postilions who had approached the scene with cruel curiosity. Raphael, either playing with his power or wishing to test it, was talking to Jonathas at the moment when his adversary fired. The ball broke a small branch of a willow-tree and ricochetted upon the water. Firing at random, Raphael shot his antagonist through the heart. Then, without paying the slightest attention to the young man, he pulled out the Magic Skin to see how much of life that other human life had cost him. The talisman was now no larger than a small oak-leaf.

"Well," he cried to the postilions, "what are you gazing at? To your saddles — let us start!"

Arriving the same night in France, he started immediately for the Baths of the Mont Dore. During the journey there came into his mind one of those sudden

thoughts which fall like a ray of light across the thick shadows of a darksome valley, — a melancholy light, an implacable wisdom, which illumines past events, unveils to us our faults, and leaves us unforgiven before the tribunal of our own souls. He thought all at once how the possession of power, no matter how mighty that power may be, does not bring with it the knowledge of how to use it. The sceptre is a plaything to a child, an axe to Richelieu, to Napoleon the lever that overturned the world. Power leaves us such as we are; it exalts none but the exalted. Raphael might have done all things; he had done nothing.

At the Baths of the Mont Dore he encountered the same society, which again shrank away from him with the haste of an animal fleeing from the carcass of one of its kind which it scents from afar. The hatred was reciprocal. The last incident in his career had given him an abiding aversion for society. His first care was therefore to find himself a spot of refuge away from the surroundings of the Baths. He instinctively felt the need of drawing near to nature, to the true emotions of that vegetative life at which we complacently play for awhile as we wander in the fields. The day after his arrival, he ascended, not without difficulty, the Pic de Sancy, visited the upland valleys, sought out the aerial scenery, the forgotten lakes, the rustic cottages of the Dore mountains, whose wild and rugged charm is beginning to attract the pencils of our artists. Sometimes he found exquisite bits of landscape, full of grace and freshness, which contrasted vividly with the dangerous aspect of the desolate mountains. Soon he came upon a spot, over a mile from the village, where nature

seemed to have delighted in hiding her treasures. After he had carefully examined this unspoiled and picturesque retreat, he resolved to live there. Existence, he thought, must be tranquil, spontaneous, fruitful, like the life of plants, in such a nook.

Imagine a reversed cone — a granite cone — deeply hollowed out, a sort of basin with its edges chipped into irregular waving lines; on the one side are flat tables of rock without vegetation, smooth and bluish in tint, on which the sun-rays glisten as on a mirror; on the other, high cliffs split by fissures, broken into by ravines, crowned with stunted trees gnarled by the wind, from the sides of which hang bowlders whose fall is slowly being compassed by the freshets. Here and there were shady cool recesses, from which the chestnut-trees rose high as cedars, or grottos, burrowing in the yellow earth, opened their deep dark mouths fringed with brier and flowering shrubs, and stretched forth long tongues of grass. At the bottom of this inverted cup, possibly the crater of an extinct volcano, was a pool, whose pure clear water had the brilliancy of a diamond. Around this basin, held in by granite rocks and bordered with willows, ash-trees, water-flags and many other aromatic plants which were then in flower, lay a strip of greensward, as smooth and velvety as an English lawn. The soft fine grass was irrigated by tiny streamlets filtering among the rocks, and nourished by vegetable deposits washed down from the mountain heights to the valleys incessantly by rains. The pool, irregularly dented, or scalloped round its edges like the bottom of a dress, was about three acres in extent. According as the cliffs approached the water or receded

from it, the intervening meadow land was an acre, or even two acres in width, though in some places barely enough ground was left for the passage of cows.

At a certain height on the mountain sides vegetation ceased. The granite rocks assumed to the eye fantastic shapes, taking on those vaporous tints which lend to the tops of mountains a likeness to the clouds of the sky, with which indeed they seemed to blend. These bare and barren cliffs, these wild and sterile images of desolation, these land-slips to be dreaded, these shapes so weird that one rock is named the "Capuchin," from likeness to a monk, formed a strong contrast to the soft beauty of the valley. Here and there the pointed peaks, the beetling rocks, the caverns far up the heights, were illuminated by the course of the sun, or by the caprices of the atmosphere, with tints of gold or shades of purple changing into rosy red and dying into grays. The aspect of the mountains changed continually with the changing lights and colors, like the iridescent reflections on a pigeon's neck. Often between two cliffs of rock, so near together that you might have thought them cleft by the axe of a giant, a lovely ray of sunlight penetrated at the rising or the setting of the sun, until it reached the depths of the smiling valley where the waters of the pool were shining, like the line of golden light from the shutter of a Spanish bedroom closed for the siesta. When the sun lay directly over the extinct crater, filled with water by some antediluvian cataclysm, the flinty basin grew hot, the old volcano glowed, the quickening warmth germinated the seeds, budded the vegetation, colored the flowers, and ripened the fruit of this tiny lost corner of the earth.

As Raphael approached, he noticed a number of cows feeding in the meadow; after taking a few steps toward the pool he saw, at a spot where the level land was widest, a humble little house built of granite and roofed with wood. This roof was covered, in true harmony with the situation, by mosses, lichens, ivies, and a few flowers of ancient growth. A slender smoke, of which the birds were no longer afraid, rose from the ruined chimney. At the door was a wide bench placed between two honeysuckles in full bloom and fragrance. The walls of the cottage could scarcely be seen beneath the branches of these vines and the garlands of roses and jessamine which crossed and covered them at their own sweet will. Indifferent to these rural adornments, the inhabitants of the house had taken no pains to train them, allowing nature to follow her virgin and tricksome grace. Baby-clothes were drying on a currant-bush. A cat was curled up on a machine for stripping hemp, beneath which, a copper caldron, recently scoured, was lying beside a pile of potato-parings. Raphael noticed on the other side of the house an inclosure of dry brushwood, intended no doubt to keep chickens from scratching among the fruits and vegetables.

It seemed as though the world ended here. The house was like certain bird's-nests ingeniously built in the cleft of a rock, specimens of science and carelessness combined. It bespoke a simple, honest nature, a true rusticity, that was poetical because it flourished ten thousand miles away from our conventional poetry, because it had no analogy with ideas, but expressed itself alone — a simple triumph of chance.

As Raphael stood there, the sun was casting its rays

from right to left, bringing out the colors of the vegetation, and setting in full relief, with the spell of its splendor and the appositions of shade, the gray and yellow rocks, the varying greens of the foliage, the blue and red and white masses of flowers, the climbing plants with their hanging bell-blooms, the changing tints of the velvet mosses, the purple clusters of the heather, but above all, the sheet of clear water which reflected the granite heights, the trees, the cottage, and the sky. In that delightful picture all things had their own lustre, from the mica of the rocks to the tuft of yellow money-wort hiding in the soft half-light. All was harmonious to the eye, — the brindled cow with polished hide, the frail aquatic blossoms bending like fringes above the water in little nooks where insects, robed in emerald or azure, hummed, and roots of trees like strands of hair stretched out and lost themselves among the shallows. The warm odors of the water, the flowers, and the grottos which perfumed this solitary retreat gave Raphael a sensation that was almost enjoyment, — a divine enjoyment of the soul.

The majestic silence which reigned in this embowered spot, forgotten perhaps on the tax-lists, was suddenly interrupted by the barking of two dogs. The cows turned their heads toward the entrance to the valley, showing Raphael their moist muzzles, and then after gazing at him stupidly, they began to feed again. Hanging to the rocks as if by magic, a goat and her kid were capering in mid-air; presently they came and stood on a granite shelf near to Valentin's head, as if they meant to question him. The yelping of the dogs brought out a fat child, who stood stock-still with his

mouth open; then came a white-haired old man of medium height. These human beings were in keeping with the scenery, the atmosphere, the verdure, and the house. Health superabounded in the midst of this exuberant nature; old age and infancy were equally sound and wholesome; there was, in fact, in all these types of existence a primordial ease, a routine happiness which gave the lie to our dull philosophical homilies.

The old man would have made an invaluable model for the virile brush of Schnetz, with his brown face covered by countless wrinkles that seemed as though they might be rough to the touch, a straight nose, high cheek-bones veined with red like an old vine-leaf, a bony frame with every characteristic of vigor even where vigor had ceased to be, and his calloused hands, horny though he no longer worked with them, covered by thin white hairs. His whole bearing was that of a free man, and gave the impression that in Italy he might at some time have been a brigand out of love for his precious liberty. The child, a true little mountaineer, had a pair of black eyes that could look at the sun without winking, a swarthy skin, and brown hair matted and tangled. He was nimble and resolute on his feet, as natural in his movements as a bird, ill-clothed and ragged, the white, fresh skin of childhood showing through the rents in his garments. The child and the old man both stood still in silence, moved by one and the same feeling, their faces expressing a perfect accord of idleness in their lives. The old man adopted the games of the child, and the child the humors of the old man, by a sort of compact between

their mutual weaknesses, — between a vigor near its end, and a force about to unfold itself.

Presently a woman, thirty years of age, came out on the sill of the open door, knitting as she walked. She was an Auvergnate, high-colored, jovial, frank, with white teeth, — Auvergne in face, Auvergne in shape, headdress and costume Auvergne, with the plump bosom of Auvergne, and above all its speech. She was a complete idealization of the country, its laborious habits, its ignorance, thrift, and cordiality — they were all in her.

She saluted Raphael, and they entered into conversation; the dogs quieted down, the old man seated himself on a bench in the sun, and the child followed his mother wherever she went, silent, but attentive and still examining the stranger.

"Are you not afraid to live here, my good woman?"

"And what should make us afraid, monsieur? We bar the entrance to our valley, and so who can get in? Oh, no, we 've no fear. Besides," she added, inviting the marquis to step into the living-room of the house, "what could robbers find to steal here?"

She pointed to the smoke-stained walls on which were hung, as sole ornament, those colored images in blue, red, and green, which represent the "Death of Credit," the "Passion of our Lord," and the "Grenadiers of the Imperial Guard." Here and there at intervals about the room stood an old four-post bedstead, a table with twisted legs, a few stools, a kneading-trough, a pot of lard hanging from the rafters, some salt in a box, and a stove; on the chimney-piece were several yellow plaster-figures highly colored. Coming out of the house, Raphael saw a man among the rocks

with a hoe in his hand, leaning forward inquisitively, and watching the house.

"Monsieur, that's my man," said the Auvergnate, with the smile peculiar to peasant-women; "he is digging up there."

"Is that old man your father?"

"Beg pardon, but he is my man's grandfather. Such as you see him he is one hundred and two years old. Hey, well! would you think it, he walked our little fellow to Clermont the other day. He 's been a strong man, he. Now he can't do much but sleep and eat and drink. But he 's always playing with the little one. Sometimes the rogue wants him to go up the heights, and he goes, too."

Raphael resolved to live with that old man and child; to breathe the same atmosphere, eat their bread, drink their water, sleep with their sleep, and get their blood into his veins. Fantastic notion of a dying man! To become a limpet on those rocks, to preserve his shell a few days longer by cheating death, seemed to him the essence of individual morality, the true formula of human existence, the beau-ideal of life, the only life, the true life. Into his heart there came one sole absorbing selfishness which blotted out the universe. To him there was no universe; the universe was he, himself. To a sick man the world begins at his pillow and ends at the foot of his bed.

Who has not, at some period of his life, watched the goings and comings of an ant, slipped a straw into the only orifice by which a slug can breathe, studied the caprices of a dragon-fly, admired the thousand little veins colored like the rose window of a cathedral, which

detach themselves from the reddish ground of a young oak-leaf? Who has never seen with delight the effect of sun and rain upon a roof of brown tiles, or watched the glitter of the dew-drops, the petals of the flowers, and the varied shapes of their calyces? Who has never plunged into sweet material reveries, indolent yet busy, without object, but leading, nevertheless, to a thought? In short, who has not, at some time, lived the life of childhood, the life of idleness, the life of the savage, without his toils? Thus lived Raphael for several days; without cares, without wishes; feeling a renewed life, an extraordinary well-being, which calmed his fears, and abated his sufferings. He scaled the heights and sat on a peak from which his eyes could take in a landscape of immense extent. There he passed whole days like a plant in the sun, like a hare in her form. At other times he made himself familiar with the phenomena of vegetation, with the changefulness of the skies; he watched the evolution of all things on the earth, in the waters, in the atmosphere.

He tried to associate himself with the inward movement of the nature about him, to identify himself so completely with its passive obedience as to come under the despotic and preservative law which governs mere instinctive existences. He desired to have charge of himself no longer. Like criminals in the olden time who, when pursued by justice, were saved if they could reach the shadow of an altar, he strove to enter the sanctuary of this still life. He succeeded in becoming an integral part of the nature about him; he shared the inclemency of the weather, lived in the hollow clefts of the rocks, learned the habits and ways of the plants,

studied the system of the waters, knew their rise and fall, and made acquaintance with the animals; in short, he became so completely one with this inanimate earth that he had, in a measure, seized its heart and penetrated its secrets. To his mind, the infinite number of forms in all the kingdoms, animal, vegetable, and mineral, were the developments of one substance, the combinations of one movement, the vast breathings of a vast being, acting, growing, moving, thinking, with whom he wished to grow and move and think and act. With fantastic insistence he blended his life with the life of those rocks and became as it were imbedded in them.

Thanks to this mysterious illuminism, working a fancied convalescence, like the beneficent delirium granted by nature to serve as a respite from suffering, Raphael enjoyed the pleasure of a second childhood during the first days of his sojourn in this smiling valley. He went about busy with a thousand nothings, beginning many things and finishing none; forgetting on the morrow the plans of the night before. He was happy; he believed himself saved. One morning he happened to stay late in bed, plunged in one of those sweet reveries between waking and sleeping which lend to reality the appearances of fancy, and give to chimeras the relief of existence, when suddenly, without at first knowing whether or not it was the continuation of his dream, he heard a bulletin of his health given by the woman of the house to Jonathas, who came each morning to inquire for him. The Auvergnate, supposing no doubt that Raphael was still asleep, took no pains to lower the tones of her mountain voice.

"He 's neither better nor worse," she was saying.

"He has coughed all this night fit to tear him to bits. He coughs and spits, the dear gentleman, till it makes my heart ache. My man and I, we keep wondering where he gets the strength to cough like that. What a cursed disease it is! I'm afraid every morning that I shall find him dead in his bed. He's as white as a wax Jesus. Goodness! I see him sometimes when he gets out of bed, — hey! his poor body is as lean as a rake. But it don't seem to matter to him; he scrambles about the rocks and spends his strength just as if he had it to sell. He has got a deal of courage, and he never complains. But as true as you're there, he had better be underground than afoot, for he suffers the torments of hell. Not that I desire it, monsieur; no, it's against our interests; but I don't think of them. Ah, good God!" she cried, "it is only Parisians who die such a dog's death. How did he get such a disease? Poor young man! He fancies he is going to get well; but that fever, don't you see, is just eating him up; it will be the death of him, though he does n't seem to see it; he does n't see anything. Don't you weep for him, Monsieur Jonathas; you must think how much happier he'll be not to suffer any more. Say a novena for him. I've seen some fine cures done by novenas; and I'll pay a wax-taper to save the poor creature — so good and gentle; why, he's like a paschal lamb —"

Raphael's voice had become too feeble to make itself heard, and he was forced to submit to this intolerable chatter. Presently, however, his irritation drove him out of bed and to the sill of his door.

"Old wretch!" he said to Jonathas, "are you determined to kill me?"

The woman thought she saw a spectre, and fled.

"I forbid you," continued Raphael, "to take the slightest interest in my health."

"Yes, Monsieur le marquis," said the old man, wiping his eyes.

"And you will do well, in future, not to come here without my orders."

Jonathas meant to obey; but before he left the room he cast a sorrowful and pitying look upon his master, — a look in which Raphael read his death-warrant. Brought suddenly back to a true sense of his condition, Valentin sat down at the threshold of the door, crossed his arms upon his breast, and bowed his head. Jonathas, alarmed, came up to him.

"Monsieur?"

"Go away! go away!" cried the sick man.

During the morning of the following day Raphael, having climbed a cliff, was sitting in a mossy ravine from which he could see the narrow road which led from the Baths to the entrance of the valley. There he perceived Jonathas, again talking with the woman. His fears interpreted the despairing gestures and the ominous shaking of their heads. Seized with horror, he fled to the highest summit of the mountains and remained there till evening, without being able to shake off the horrible thoughts roused in his mind by the pity of which he now felt himself the object. Suddenly the woman herself rose before him, like a shadow among the shadows of the twilight; with poetic fancy, he saw in the black and white stripes of her petticoat a vague resemblance to the dried ribs of a spectre.

"The dew is falling, my dear monsieur," she said.

"If you stay here you won't get a bit better than a rotten fruit. You must come in. It is n't healthy to breathe the night-damp, especially when you have n't eaten anything since morning."

"In God's name," he cried, "I order you, old witch, to let me live as I please, or I leave your place. It is enough to have you dig my grave every morning; at least you shall not pry into it at night."

"Your grave, monsieur! dig your grave! Why, I 'd like to see you as lively as the grandfather down there, and not in your grave. We 'll all get there soon enough — into our graves."

"Silence!" said Raphael.

"Take my arm, monsieur."

"No."

The feeling in the hearts of others that men can least bear is pity, above all when they deserve it. Hatred is a tonic; it makes a man live, it inspires vengeance; but pity kills, it weakens our weakness. It is contempt lurking in tenderness, or tenderness that is half-insulting. Raphael saw the pity of superiority in the eyes of the hale old man; in those of the child the pity of curiosity; in the woman a meddlesome pity; in the husband the pity of self-interest; but under whatever guise it appeared to him, it was big with Death. To a poet all things are a poem, be they joyous or terrible, according to the images they imprint upon his mind; his soul rejects the softer tints and chooses those that are vivid and clear-cut. This pity induced in Raphael's mind a ghastly poem of sadness and mourning. In drawing nigh to nature he had not considered the frankness of natural sentiments. When he thought

himself alone under a tree struggling with the horrible cough which left him shattered and almost lifeless, he saw the bright moist eyes of the little boy, perched like a sentry on a grassy mound, and watching him with that childish curiosity in which there is quite as much of raillery and scorn as of interest mingled with sheer indifference. That awful sentence of the Trappists, "Brother, thou must die!" seemed written in the eyes of all those among whom Raphael now lived. He scarcely knew what he dreaded most, their simple words or their silence; both exasperated him.

One morning he saw two men dressed in black wandering about within sight of his retreat, apparently observing him furtively; then, pretending to be taking a walk, they approached and asked him a few commonplace questions, to which he replied briefly. He recognized the doctor and the curate belonging to the Baths, sent no doubt by Jonathas, by agreement with his landlady, or attracted, he thought, by the scent of a coming death. A vision of his own funeral passed before his eyes; he heard the chanting of the priests; he counted the wax-tapers; he saw through crape the beauties of surrounding nature, — that rich nature which so lately he believed to have given him life. All that once seemed to promise him a long life now prophesied his speedy end. He could bear it no longer. The next morning he started for Paris, followed by the melancholy, kindly, and pitying wishes of the inhabitants of the valley.

After travelling all night he opened his eyes in one of the smiling valleys of the Bourbonnais, whose scenery whirled around him and past him, swept onward like

the nebulous images of a dream. Nature spread herself before his eyes with cruel coquetry. Sometimes the Allier rolled its shining liquid ribbon far into the distance of a fertile perspective; then the hamlets modestly nestling in a gorge of yellow cliffs showed the spires of their steeples. Here and there the windmills of a little valley broke the monotony of the vineyards, and on all sides gay châteaux, villages clinging to the hillsides, roads bordered with poplars could be seen, while the Loire with its glistening waters flowed between golden sands. Charms without end! Nature, living, vigorous as a child, o'erflowing with love and the spring-time sap of the month of June, attracted with awful power the eyes of the dying man. He lowered the blinds of the carriage window and tried to sleep.

Toward evening, after passing Cosne, he was awakened by joyous music, and found himself in the middle of a village fête. The post-house was in the square. While the postilions were changing horses he watched the dances of the happy crowd. The young girls decked with flowers were pretty and enticing, the swains animated, the old folks ruddy and jovial with their wine. Children were romping about; old women talked and laughed; everything had a voice; gayety enlivened even the costumes and the tables set out in the street. The village square with its church presented a picture of simple happiness; the roofs, the windows, even the doors of the houses wore a festal air. Raphael, like all dying persons, was sensitive to noise, and he could not restrain an angry exclamation, nor the wish to silence those violins, to put an end to the tumult and stop the gay dances of the annoying

festival. He got wearily back into his carriage. Glancing presently at the square he saw the peasantry dispersing; the benches were deserted, the gayety at an end. On the scaffolding of the orchestra a blind fiddler was still playing a squeaking tune on his violin. That music without dancers, that solitary old man with a surly face, clothed in rags, his hair matted, half-hidden in the shadow of a linden, were the fantastic images of Raphael's wish. The rain fell in torrents from one of those electric clouds so frequent in the month of June, which begin and end with equal suddenness. It was so natural a circumstance that Raphael, after noticing the white clouds in the heavens as they whirled away in the gusts of wind, never even looked at the Magic Skin. He settled himself in the carriage and was soon rolling toward Paris.

On the morrow he was once more at home, in his own home, seated by the chimney, near an immense fire, for he was cold. Jonathas brought him letters; they were all from Pauline. He opened the first without eagerness, unfolding it as though it were a summons sent by a tax-gatherer. He read the first sentence, — "Gone! is it flight, my Raphael? What! can no one tell me where you are? If I do not know it, who else can?" Without reading another word he coldly took up all the letters and threw them into the fire, watching with dull and lifeless eyes the play of the flames as they licked up the perfumed paper, twisting and shrivelling and devouring it. Fragments rolled down among the ashes, allowing him to read the beginning of sentences and words and thoughts that were only half

consumed; he even took pleasure in deciphering them, as though it were some mechanical game.

"Sitting at your door — waiting — capricious — I obey — Rivals — I, no! — your own Pauline — love — no more? — Though you leave me you would never abandon me — Love eternal — To die! —"

The words caused him a species of remorse; he seized the tongs and caught a fragment of a letter from the flames.

"I murmured," she wrote, "but I have not complained, my Raphael. If you have left me, it is, no doubt, to spare me the burden of some grief. It may be that you will some day kill me, but you are too good to torture me. Never leave me thus again. I can face all trials if you are with me. The grief that you may cause me will not be grief. I have more love in my heart than I have ever shown you. I can bear all things except to weep in solitude away from you, and not to know if you —"

Raphael put the blackened fragment on the chimney-piece; then he flung it back into the fire. That paper was too vivid an image of his love and of his fatal life.

"Jonathas," he said, "go and fetch Monsieur Bianchon."

Horace came, and found Raphael in bed.

"My friend, can you give me some gentle opiate which shall keep me always in a state of somnolence and yet do my health no harm?"

"Nothing is easier," said the young physician; "but you must get up some hours in the day to eat your meals."

"Some hours!" said Raphael, interrupting him. "No, no; only one hour at most."

"What are you aiming at?" asked Bianchon.

"Sleep is still life, you know," answered the patient. "Let no one in," he added, speaking to Jonathas while the doctor wrote a prescription, "not even your mistress."

"Well, Monsieur Horace, what hope is there?" asked the old servant the moment they were on the portico.

"He may live some time; he may die to-night. The chances of life and death are very nearly balanced in him. I can't understand it!" replied the young physician, in a tone of discouragement. "He needs amusement. You must distract his mind."

"Distract him! monsieur, you don't know him. Why, the other day he killed a man without a word! Nothing, I tell you, distracts him!"

Raphael remained for several days in this condition of induced sleep. Thanks to the material power of opium over our immaterial being, this man of high and active imagination lowered himself to the level of those slothful animals who crouch in the depths of a forest and take the form of vegetable decay to seize their prey without seeking it. He denied himself even the light of heaven, — the windows were darkened. Towards eight o'clock in the evening he rose from his bed to satisfy his hunger, but without any clear consciousness of existence, and then returned to it. The cold and barren hours brought him nothing more than confused images, vague apparitions, the flicker of dim lights on a black background. He was buried in utter silence, in a blind negation of motion and intellect.

One evening he waked much later than usual and found his dinner not ready. He rang for Jonathas.

"Leave my service," he said. "I have made you rich; you can be happy in your old age, but you shall no longer trifle with my life. Wretched man! I am hungry. Where is my dinner? am I to wish for it? Answer."

Jonathas gave a smile of satisfaction, took a wax-taper, whose light glimmered in the deep obscurity of the vast apartments, and led his master, now a machine in his hands, to the door of the great gallery which he abruptly threw open. Raphael, bathed in a sudden flood of light, stood still, amazed and dazzled by what he saw. The lustres were filled with candles, choicest flowers, artistically arranged, adorned a table that sparkled with silver and gold and glass and porcelain; a regal repast fit to tempt the jaded appetites of a palace was there. He saw his friends and companions, and with them he saw beautiful women, elegantly dressed, their necks and shoulders bare, their eyes brilliant, their heads bedecked with flowers, wearing the costumes of distant lands and other times. One wore the graceful jacket of an Irish girl; another the alluring "basquina" of the Andalusians. Diana of the chase, half-clothed, and Mademoiselle de La Vallière, modest yet amorous, were present. All eyes sparkled with pleasure and delight. When Raphael's dead face looked in upon them from the open door acclamations burst forth, glowing and vehement as the sudden blaze of the unexpected feast. For an instant the voices, the perfumes, the lights, and the penetrating beauty of the women seized upon his senses and awakened him.

Delightful music came in a torrent of harmony from an adjoining room, and completed the strange vision. Raphael felt the pressure of a soft hand, a woman's hand, whose white and fragrant arms were raised to clasp him, — the hand of Aquilina. He comprehended then that the scene was not vague and fantastic like the fugitive visions of his distorted dreams; uttering a dreadful cry, he shut the door violently and struck his old servant a blow on the face.

"Monster, have you sworn my death?" he cried. Then, still throbbing with the sense of the danger he had escaped, he gathered up his strength, and fled to his room, drank a deep draught of sleep and went to bed.

"The devil!" cried old Jonathas, recovering himself. "Monsieur Bianchon certainly told me to distract him."

It was nearly midnight. By one of those physiological caprices which are the wonder and the despair of science, Raphael became resplendent in beauty during sleep. A bright color glowed on his pallid cheek. His noble brow, pure as a young girl's, revealed his genius. Life was in flower, as it were, upon that tranquil, peaceful face. He was like a child sleeping under the care of a mother. His sleep was a good sleep; a pure and equable breath came from the coral lips; he smiled, entranced no doubt by some dream of a noble life. Was he an aged man, were his grandchildren playing at his knee and wishing him still longer life? From his rustic bench in the sunshine, beneath the foliage, did he see, like the prophet from the mountain-top, in the far and blessed distance, the promised land?

"I have found thee!"

The words, uttered in a silvery voice, dispersed the nebulous figures of his dream. By the light of a lamp he saw Pauline sitting on the bed, his Pauline, — yet a Pauline embellished by absence and by grief. Raphael remained speechless as he looked at the fair face, white as the petals of a water-lily, and now shaded by the falling of her long, black hair. Tears had left their traces on her cheeks and suffused her eyes, ready to fall at a word. Robed in white, with bowed head and scarcely touching the bed on which she rested, she was like an angel descending from heaven, a spirit, an apparition, which a breath might drive away.

"Ah! I have forgotten all; I do not blame thee," she cried, as Raphael opened his eyes. "I have no voice except to tell thee that I am thine. Yes, my heart is love, love only. Ah! angel of my life, how beautiful thou art; never so beautiful as now. Thine eyes devour me — But I have guessed all; it was in search of health —"

"Away, away! go, leave me," said Raphael at last, in a muffled voice. "Go, I say. If you stay there I die. Would you see me die?"

"Die!" she repeated. "Canst thou die without me? Die? but thou art young. Die? but I love thee. Die?" she added in a guttural voice, taking his hands with a frenzied movement.

"Cold!" she said; "is it an illusion?"

Raphael drew from beneath his pillow the fatal skin, now shrunken to the dimensions of a vinca-leaf. He showed it to her.

"Pauline, dear image of my beautiful life," he said, "we must bid each other farewell."

"Farewell?" she repeated in tones of amazement.

"Yes, this talisman accomplishes my wishes, and represents my life. See how little remains of it. If you look at me again, if I long for happiness with thee, I die."

The young girl thought him mad; she took the talisman and carried it to the lamp. By the flickering light which fell upon Raphael and also on the talisman, she examined attentively the face of the one, and the last morsel of the Magic Skin. As she stood there, beautiful with terror and with love, Raphael was no longer master of his thought: recollections of tender scenes, of the passion of his lost joys, triumphed in the soul that he had put to sleep, and roused it like a smouldering fire.

"Pauline, Pauline, come to me!"

A terrible cry burst from her throat, her eyes dilated, her eyebrows, dragged by some untold anguish, drew apart with horror; she read in Raphael's eyes a passionate desire, once her glory, but as it grew the Skin contracted in her hand and to her sight. Without an instant's reflection she fled into the adjoining room and locked the door.

"Pauline, Pauline!" cried the dying man, rushing after her. "I love thee! I adore thee! I will curse thee if thou dost not open! I choose to die with thee!"

With unnatural strength, the last effort of vitality, he burst open the door and saw her writhing on an ottoman. Pauline, seeking vainly for death, was endeavoring to strangle herself with her shawl: —

"If I die, he lives!" she cried, struggling to tighten the knot.

Her hair hung loose, her shoulders were bare, her clothing in disorder; in this wild struggle for death,

with tearful eyes and a flushed face and writhing in the anguish of her horrible despair she met the eyes of Raphael and augmented his delirium; he darted towards her with the lightness of a bird of prey, tore the shawl away, and tried to clasp her in his arms. The dying creature sought for words to utter the desire that possessed him, but no sounds came except the strangling death-rattle in his throat, — each breath he drew, more hollow than the last, seeming to come from his very entrails. At the last moment, furious at his own weakness, he bit her in the breast. Jonathas, terrified by the cries he heard, rushed in, and struggled to tear his mistress from the dead body to which she clung in a corner of the room.

"What do you want?" she demanded. "He is mine. I have killed him. Did I not predict it?"

EPILOGUE.

"And what became of Pauline?"

"Pauline? Ah! Do you sometimes sit of a pleasant winter evening beside your family hearth, given over to delightful memories of youth and love as you watch the lines of fire among the logs? Here the glowing embers seem the red squares of a checker-board, there they shimmer softly like velvet; the blue flames run, and dart up, and play upon the surface of the live coal. A painter comes; he takes that flame; by some art, known only to himself, he draws amid those lambent tints of violet or crimson, a spiritual figure of unspeak-

able delicacy, a fleeting vision that no chance or circumstance recalls; it is a woman, whose hair floats in the breeze, whose profile breathes forth blissful passion, — fire within fire! she smiles, she dies away, you will see her no more. Farewell, flower of the Flame; farewell, essence incomplete as yet, and not expected; come too early or too late to be the diamond of our lives —"

"But Pauline?"

"Ah, you do not see? I will try again. Make way! make way! She comes, queen of illusions, the woman who passes like a kiss, the woman vivid as the lightning, falling like the lightning in fire from heaven; the being uncreated, all spirit, all love. She is clothed with a body of flame, or, is it that for her, and for an instant, flame is living? The lines of her form are of such purity that you know she comes from heaven. Does she not shine as the Shining Ones? do you not hear the airy beat of her wings? Buoyant as a bird, she alights beside you; her solemn eyes entrance you, her soft yet compelling breath attracts your lips by magic force; she flies, and draws you with her; you touch the earth no longer. You try to lay your quivering hand, your fascinated hand, upon that snowy body, to touch the golden hair, to kiss those sparkling eyes. A vapor intoxicates you, enchanting music charms you. You tremble in every nerve, you are all desire, all suffering. Oh, happiness without a name! you have touched that woman's lips —but lo! a sharp pain wakens you. Ha! you have struck your head against the angle of the bedpost, you kissed the brown mahogany, the cold gilding, a bit of iron, or that brass Cupid —"

"But, monsieur, Pauline?"

"What, again? Listen. On a lovely morning a young man leading by the hand a pretty woman embarked at Tours on the 'Ville d'Angers.' Standing thus united, they watched and admired, above the broad waters of the Loire, a white form issuing from the bosom of the mist, like an offspring of the water and the sun, or some effluence of the clouds and the air. Undine or sylph, the fluid creature floated in the atmosphere, like a word sought in vain as it flits through the memory and will not let itself be caught; she glided among the islands, and waved her head above the poplars; then, rising to colossal height, each fold of her drapery became resplendent as the halo drawn by the sun around her face. She hovered thus above the hamlets and about the hills, seeming to forbid the little steamer to pass before the château D'Ussy. You might have thought her the phantom of the Lady of the Loire seeking to protect her country from invasion."

"Well, well; I think I understand Pauline; but Fedora, what of her?"

"Oh, Fedora? you meet her every day. Last night she was at the Bouffons; to-night she will be at the opera. She is everywhere; call her, if you like, Society."

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